

# ELEMENTARY ENGLISH

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

LOIS LENSKI

GUIDING CREATIVE EXPRESSION

INDIVIDUALIZED READING

THE PLACE OF PHONICS



MAY,  
1953

# Elementary ENGLISH

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# ELEMENTARY ENGLISH

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## *Lois Lenski's Regional Literature*

LELAND B. JACOBS<sup>1</sup>

Lois Lenski has worked diligently in the interests of children through her writing. She has written delightfully for the young child in the doings of the Small family and in her short but perceptive seasonal interpretations. She has produced distinctive historical fiction for older children. But undoubtedly her most distinguished contribution to the field of children's literature has been her regional fiction, in which she has pioneered and has achieved a level of creative accomplishment that gives her the distinction of being the most widely known contributor in this genre today. Year by year an appreciative and eager audience of boys and girls look forward to exploring another vital American life situation with Lois Lenski, whose eye is clear, whose mind is sensitive, whose ear is attune to the tempo and overtones of child living in readily identified settings in our vast country.

For any writer who would work with integrity, regional literature poses unique problems and imposes spiritual obligations. If the writer works within the regional setting in which he is reared, he runs

the risk of being so deeply involved personally that he is narrowly provincial. If the writer goes into a region new to him to gather his material, he runs the risk of being so charmed by the picturesque that he fails to comprehend the essential elements that are affecting the total behavioral patterns of life in the community.

Good regional fiction for children is neither subjectively sentimental nor objectively superficial. It has, rather, a neat balance of honest sentiment, accurate descriptive detail, and insight into the spirit and quality of mind of the people of whom the author would write. Its purpose is not to mirror the life of the region so much as it is to illuminate such living. Its aim is not to judge the patterns of regional mores and customs; it aims to explore regional behavior as insightfully and sympathetically as the talents of the writer permit. Its obligation to the reader is so to absorb him into the story that he lives as richly as possible in the family and peer groups, in the home and community of a

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child whose life is both like and different from his own. Good regional fiction assures the reader a high type of entertainment which is achieved because he has lived sympathetically for a moment in the lives of others whose cultural conditions are vitally involved in the story to be told. And in the larger sense, true regional fiction looks intimately inward upon life in a particular geographical locale at a given moment in time not to glorify locale or to promote sectionalism but rather to comprehend locale so intimately that a sense of the universality of man's quest for the good life emerges. Through the printed page, then, the young reader comes to see that, from "sea to shining sea," American children are all searching for ways to live healthfully, happily. That their questings and searchings must, of course, be conditioned by the environment in which they live makes a difference. And cultural differences must be respectfully treated, implies the competent writer in this field, for from diversity there can come national strength.

Few writers for children have been to articulate with regard to their philosophy about a genre in which they produce as has Lois Lenski. She has stated her values and beliefs and ideals concerning writing of child life within the culture unequivocally. In her foreword to a collection of regional stories for children entitled *Told under Spacious Skies*, she says:

Through the medium of the printed word, the reader is transported into the lives of others for a short time. He lives with them in their particular setting—on lofty mountain, in crowded city, on farm, ranch, or river, in cotton field or peach orchard. He shares their struggles and their joys, his concern over their fate

is actively aroused—he has forgotten himself and his selfish concerns for a while. He has been enriched by the experience of entering the lives of others.

Surely all our children deserve this opportunity, the right to know how others in our own country live.

Through such stories, the child learns not to ridicule or look down upon others because they are different from himself. He learns that the pattern of life is unending in its variety, and need not—in fact, should not—conform to a monotonous similarity. He learns to respect the rights of the individual, though of differing race, creed, culture, or background, in his struggle against conformity in a mass-production, machine-age world. He learns to appreciate people in all walks of life, not only his own.

He acquires new respect and reverence for life in all its various manifestations. He begins to look deeper than appearance, deeper than a spoken accent or a surface materialism, deeper than social castes and conventions, to a sounder appreciation of human character. Only as a person is judged in the light of his environment, and the economic and social pressures which it brings on his way of life, can he be understood for his own true worth.

How can children learn to live, if their reading (a vicarious extension of living) does not present honest studies of human beings and their relationships one with another? Why should authors camouflage human character, delete from stories all mention of the tragic and sordid side of life, and present only a glamorized, synthetic picture of life as it never existed? No wonder children become dissatisfied, and turn to other, often spurious, sources of excitement and drama. If the basic essentials of real living are omitted from their reading, books and stories will be automatically cast aside.

Children are honest. They are never satisfied with the spurious. They want the truth, and they are strong enough to take it. They deserve the best—stories of real people as they really live, stories of the experiences which they face in everyday life, of their aspirations and struggles, of

their joys and sorrows, and the ultimate rewards of courage facing impossible odds. Such stories will give children faith in the meaning, the purpose and beauty of life; courage in meeting it, and strength to reach beyond the gloom and shadows to the radiant joy of living.<sup>2</sup>

Here is a worthy credo for the writer of regional fiction who would genuinely meet the mind of the child. It is a credo that values children as a great national resource, that trusts children with important big ideas, that recognizes children's abilities to explore significant problems of living if these problems are geared to their level of maturity. Moreover, here is a writer who is explicit about her faith that literature for children must come to grips with philosophical and sociological matters that touch the hearts and minds of boys and girls intimately. In no sense does this imply, however, that Lois Lenski would approve indoctrination or didacticism in fiction. Such spurious ends would belie her criterion of "stories of real people as they really live."

For each of her own regional stories this writer has written a foreword which further clarifies her position. In *Strawberry Girl*, for example, Lenski states: "In this series of regional books for American children, I am trying to present vivid, sympathetic pictures of the real life of different kinds of Americans, against authentic backgrounds of diverse localities. We need to know our country better; to know and understand people different from ourselves; so that we can say, 'This then is the way these people lived. Because I understand'" (Literature Committee of the Association for Childhood Education, *Told under Spacious Skies* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), pp. viii-ix.

stand it, I admire and love them.' Is not this a rich heritage for our American children?"

In her introduction to *Blue Ridge Billy* she says:

It is easy to see why a certain environment makes people live as they do, and affects every phase of their life—why in water-soaked Louisiana where it is too wet to raise land crops, the people make a living by fishing; and how in the dry sandy soil of Florida, a struggle is necessary to grow oranges and strawberries; and how farming on the steep hillsides in the mountains has kept the mountain people cut off from the rest of the world. When we understand their environment and see how their lives have been conditioned thereby, then we can understand their behavior. We can imagine ourselves in the same situation, and we wonder if we would be different.

My own experience in getting stories from people who have lived them has been so rich that I have tried to pass them on to others. It is my hope that young people, reading my regional books, will share the life of these people as I shared it, and—living it vicariously, through the means of a vivid, dramatic, authentic, real-life story—will learn something of that tolerance which will make all men brothers.

I am trying to say to children that all people are flesh and blood and have feelings like themselves, no matter where they live or how simply they live or how little they have; that man's material comforts should not be the end and object of life. I am trying to point out that people of character, people who are guided by spiritual values, come often from simple surroundings, and are worthy of our admiration and even our emulation.

In one way or another the forewords of all her recent books of regional fiction show Lois Lenski's concern that the American child should be well acquainted with "all the vividness and drama that the American scene holds."

When one turns more directly to the

works of this author, one notes first the locales that have held her attention: the Cajun country of Louisiana; Ashe County, North Carolina; the Cracker country of Florida; the oil lands of Oklahoma; the Atlantic costal plains; the cotton belt of Arkansas; the ranch territory of Texas; the Dakota prairies, for example. Here are rural settings and an agrarian viewpoint. They reflect, then, the influence that the country and small town still have upon a society that has become rapidly urbanized. They are actual, to be sure, as regional settings, and real in ideology, but they are skewed toward a concept of less urbane living than the totality that is our land today might suggest. Herein lies the significance of Lois Lenski's contribution to regional fiction, and also the limitation. Some other writer will have to supply the stories of urbanized locales and thus complement what this writer has so successfully achieved.

Lois Lenski's method of going into a locality and living and working there suggests how thoroughly she believes in the first-hand experience as a necessary ingredient for the development of serious regional fiction for children. By living and working with those about whom she writes, she is able to sensitize herself both to the obvious, material cultural environment and the psychological and spiritual motivations of those about whom she would write. Yet this author assiduously avoids the picturesque for its own sake. When, in *Strawberry Girl*, the Mt. Lebanon Church is described as a "long, box-like structure" with "handmade benches with sloping backs," the reader is not looking at a rural oddity but rather he goes in-

to the church with a family. He knows that "the best thing about it was the organ music" because Berdie, the heroine, believed that to be true.

Again, in *Cotton in My Sack*, the writer pictures portions of a Saturday in town:

They went into the Beehive and they all got new clothes, the girls each a cotton dress and sweater, the boys overalls, shirts and caps. When they came out they had bulky packages under their arms. They stopped at Hank's hot-dog stand and bought hot-dogs and cold drinks.

They came to the Goodwill, a big brick store that covered half a block. It said GOODWILL FOR EVERYBODY across the top. Here, everything was sold—groceries, dry goods, notions, hardware, seeds and farm machinery. It was a common meeting place for the country people. A radio on a chair outside the store door blared hillbilly music. Mama and the children stopped to listen.

Then they went in.

On page after page, the reader lives with people whose food, clothing, and shelter, whose institutions, whose modes of entertainment may differ from those that the reader knows. And yet this writer is consistently considerate of the workaday customs and habits of the people who populate her stories. She creates the essence of the setting by involving the characters in situations that call forth the use of the artifacts of culture familiar to the locale. Without becoming provincial, the writer thus involves vicariously her young readers as participants in an environment that is, at one and the same time, typically individual and typically American.

Lois Lenski's plots have about them, from book to book, an episodic quality that implies, at first glance, a lack of inventiveness. However, stories that find their bear-

ings in the daily life activities of a child as he lives in his family and his community must be couched in a pattern that is suggestive of the way life happenings do occur. Too tightly structured a plot might very well defeat the writer who would catch the colorings and flavors of ordinary, every-day events. Life is not that neat. In every one of Lois Lenski's regional stories, children are facing up to the developmental tasks of living. Their plots center not so much in actionful adventure as in vital solutions to personal problems. In *Strawberry Girl*, how does a child help her family establish itself in a new community? In *Boom Town Boy*, how does one live with new wealth? In *Prairie School*, how does one out-wit the villain, weather? In *Judy's Journey*, how does the child of the migrant worker make life good?

Sociologically rooted, these stories are not sociological treatises. They escape this pitfall because they are human documents, centering their attention on individual personalities that come to life on the printed page in human dramas of courage, faith, industry, and affections. These people are not abstractions, not stereotypes in the ordinary sense of such terms. They are, rather, symbols of American common folk who work and play in their own unique ways because their homes and communities have been so great an influence on their living and learning. Thus, in these regional stories, one moves with a character through his daily tasks as he works to solve a problem. This movement constitutes the essential plot of the story, episodic though it may appear at first glance. Certainly this type of plot is better handled in some

books than in others. One might look to *Blue Ridge Billy*, *Strawberry Girl*, or *Prairie School* to observe Lois Lenski's plot patterns at their best.

Because her ear is tuned to the tempo and overtones of language, and because language itself is so humanizing a force, Miss Lenski has given astute attention to this matter in her regional stories. Of this matter she writes in her foreword to *Blue Ridge Billy*:

We have as many different kinds of American speech as we have regions. It is interesting to consider in how many different ways the American language is used. Speech is so much more than words—it is poetry, beauty, character, emotion. To give the flavor of a region, to suggest the moods of the people, the atmosphere of the place, speech cannot be overlooked. When I remember the soft, velvety tones of the bayou-French people, the way they transfer our English words into their native French rhythm, when I hear again the soft, lazy drawl of the Florida Crackers, or the mountain people with fine old forgotten Elizabethan phrases on their lips, it seems to me sacrilege to transfer their speech to correct, grammatical, School-Reader English, made easy enough for the dullest child to read. To me, this would be a travesty on all the beauty and character in the lives of these people.

Words become alive only with use. A coat takes on the character of a man, after he has worn it and shaped it to his person—it becomes truly his and reflects his personality. Until words are used they are dead and lifeless. Through use, words become living speech, echoing the spirit within. Words need to be "worn" to attain beauty.

It is not so much dialect that she uses to capture the language patterns of the peoples of whom she writes as it is the natural speech rhythms of the locales that more deeply show the sureness of her ear. What colloquialisms she uses have about them dignity and warmth. They are caught

up naturally in the overtones of what seem, on the printed page, to be spoken words that come from the minds and hearts of real people.

In the introduction to *Peanuts for Billy Ben* Lois Lenski extends this invitation to children: "Come, let us look at the ways of life in our country. Let us go into out-of-the-way corners, upon the hills and down in the valleys, into city streets and village homes. Let us see and get to know the people. Here and there, round about America, are friends worth knowing." This is a fine invitation to young readers, and an honest one. But an invitation implies an obligation to those who accept and this author is up to her responsibility. Since the publication of *Bayou Suzette* in 1943 she

has been entertaining audiences of pre-adolescent readers with reading fare of regional fiction that is well-seasoned, nourishing, and appealing. In retrospect, one can see that from the days of the publication of *Skipping Village* Lois Lenski has been getting ready to extend her invitation to children to "see beyond the rim of their own world."

Nine out of ten times Lois Lenski has taken her readers south: *Bayou Suzette*, *Strawberry Girl*, *Blue Ridge Billy*, *Boom Town Boy*, *Cotton in My Sack*, *Judy's Journey*, *Texas Tomboy*, *Peanuts for Billy Ben*, and *We Live in the South*. In *Prairie School* she moved north. "Where next?" one asks eagerly.

## *A Constructive Approach to the Writing Period*

M. EMILY GREENAWAY<sup>1</sup>

Being a wholehearted believer in the theory that children "make up stories" as naturally as they eat frosted cookies and something is dead wrong when they don't, I have been interested during the past few months in taking (and sometimes deliberately making) every possible opportunity for first-hand study of the various techniques and methods being used by elementary school teachers to teach children to write. I have observed many classes and talked with many teachers. Some of my findings are amazing; some, inspiring; some, sickening. With the hope that they might be of some value to other language arts teachers in their efforts to help children learn how to express themselves

through writing, I would like to share the most outstanding of these experiences.

Let us start off with the very, very bad method—the most destructive method—observed and work our way up the scale.

### *Penmanship and Writing Combined*

The teacher of a fifth grade was teaching penmanship and writing at the same time! Every pupil had to sit straight in his seat, left arm resting on the desk holding the paper at a prescribed angle, pen pointing over the shoulder, and make scrawls on the paper as the teacher chanted, "round, round, round, round, up, down, 'New Jersey State Teachers College, Paterson, New Jersey.

up, down." The teacher circulated around the room, straightening a shoulder here, tilting a pen there, holding a little hand going "round, round, round, round." After this drill, the children copied a short paragraph from the teacher's beautiful 'script on the blackboard. It was the first paragraph of the story, *Lassie, Come Home*. Still sitting upright like little manikins, holding the pen just so, the children were told to fill the rest of the page with, "What happened Then?" The amazing thing to me was that some of the little ones actually did keep right on writing a continuation of the story. Others just sat there, pen in hand, trying to think. Still others just sat there, bored and restless. If by the end of the period any one had not written the rest of the page full, he had to do it for homework.

In an interview with this teacher, I learned that this is a typical daily lesson. She feels victorious because her plan "gets them all writing," something she has never been able to do before because, she says, "children just hate to write." Any comment I might make about this method would be too obvious to give it space.

#### *Reading-Writing Period*

A sixth-grade teacher was correlating reading and writing. The class was reading a dog story. The teacher told the children to read for fifteen minutes. If there were any words they did not know the meaning of, she would come to help them. A great silence fell on the room. Most of the children seemed to be reading—although I noticed that one boy did not turn a single page and some of the children looked around the room or made faces at one another. Then the teacher wrote six questions

on the blackboard: "Why did the dog run away?"; "How did the men know he was not a wild dog?" The "writing assignment" was to answer these questions from memory—or from imagination in some cases, I'd wager.

*Criticism:* This motivation may help some children to read carefully, seeking answers to possible questions, but it certainly takes the fun out of reading a good dog story. The writing experience of simply answering questions from material just read seems to me a stultifying experience. To write an opinion of the story, to tell of some experience the story made the child remember, to write about something similar to the story read, all these would be self-expression.

This teacher told me that she had evolved the plan in order to give the children something to write about, that she has found out that if she has the children write about just anything they can think of, they don't know what to write. She conducts these reading-writing periods twice a week and corrects all errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar. I was not at all surprised when she admitted that her pupils do not like writing and do not do well in writing. She has made it a drudgery, a task imposed, with every writing experience a test of the child's technical knowledge of grammar, spelling, and punctuation instead of a joyous outpouring of his thoughts and feelings.

Another teacher who believes that children must be "assigned a topic" before he will write is a fifth-grade teacher who informed me that she does not think much of any of the new methods of teaching

writing because they let the children "ramble too much." She prefers a regular writing period with definite topics such as "Yesterday's Snow Storm," "My Pets," "My Favorite Television Program." She also maintains that it is bad practice to let any errors in spelling, or punctuation, or sentence structure, or grammar go by without immediate correction. As the children struggle with her assigned topics, she goes around the room reading over their shoulders, making corrections, and being sure that "they keep writing about what they've been told to write about."

*Criticism:* Such a writing period as this teacher describes seems to me a sterile situation. It makes no allowance for the individual child's creative imagination, mood, inclination to write, immediate excitement over something. The only motivation is the teacher's choice of topics that she thinks the children ought to respond to. I shudder to think what I would write if someone sat me down in a room with a clock ticking away at my elbow and told me to write on *this* topic when my mind was full of *that* topic. Also, having his writing corrected during his creative period balks and frustrates any child's expression of his thoughts.

#### *Practical Writing*

In a fourth grade, the teacher was having a class in "practical writing." He started out all right by asking the children how they would like to write a letter to "Jimmy," who was out of school for an operation. The children were delighted with the idea and some started right in to write. But, no. That was not how it was to be done. First the teacher had to make a model on the blackboard. He questioned

members of the class about what should go in the heading and carefully wrote a complete, correct heading on the blackboard. The eager little ones were forced to curb their impatience to write while the teacher reminded them all that abbreviations are never used in headings, that the way to start a letter is, "Dear Jimmy," and to finish is, "Yours truly." This pedantic discussion went on for fifteen minutes while the children and I squirmed in our seats. Finally, the paper was passed out and the time had come to write. When someone asked if all the letters were going to be sent to Jimmy, the teacher said, "No. I'll pick out the best one or two and send them." Immediately, three or four children stopped writing. One boy decided to sharpen everyone's pencil. All the vitality had gone out of the project. It was now a "writing lesson."

*Criticism:* I am sure Jimmy would have received better letters if the children had been permitted to write spontaneously whatever they thought Jimmy would like to know. The teacher squeezed the life out of the project by stimulating the children to creative activity through the suggestion of writing to a classmate and then forcing them to inactivity while he explained rules. So much more would have been accomplished if the children had been given the chance to write a "group letter," everybody contributing a sentence or two, and that would have been fun. Also, it was very bad to say only one or two letters would be sent. Naturally the poor writers knew that their letters would be eliminated and they lost all interest in writing.

The sixth-grade teacher in that same school said in an interview that he does

not have regular writing periods, as such, but does have the children write whenever some definite occasion arises: a letter to an absent classmate; a 'thank you note' to some one who has done something for the class; a report on some trip or excursion. He expects all the pupils to write about the idea he suggests and in the form that he assigns: letter, report, composition. He thinks only "the gifted" can do creative writing such as poetry and stories and he is sure that they will write outside of class if they are really "gifted." He is always glad to have children bring in anything they have written outside and, if he thinks it is good, he will read it to the class. Of course, he "smooths out any rough spots" and makes any necessary corrections. He feels definitely that class time should not be wasted doing creative writing but that everyone should learn practical writing. His response to my question, "Do the children like to write?" was: "Oh they like it well enough. Some do. Some don't. Some would rather do arithmetic."

**Criticism:** This teacher has lost sight of the objectives of education. Since the important thing is child development and creative writing is self expression, an important element in child development, any time allowed the child to write his own thoughts and feelings is not wasted. His program is inflexible; the children are regimented; and there is no creative joy in their writing.

#### *Writing Motivated by Unfinished Story*

The teacher of a class of third-graders announced that he was going to read the story of the Walrus and the Carpenter from *Alice in Wonderland*. The children sat bright-eyed to hear the story. But be-

fore beginning, the teacher explained that there were some words and expressions that they would all have to know to understand the story. So he wrote on the blackboard ten words: billows, sulkily, quantities of sand, beseech, briny beach, oysterbed, frothy, sympathize, and walrus. Volunteers told what each word meant and the teacher polished the definitions and wrote them after the words on the blackboard. This seemed to me a dismal way to start off Lewis Carroll's delightful nonsense and I am sure that many of the children thought so too because they took no part in the discussion about words and did not seem interested when the teacher finally started to read. He read the poem as far as the last stanza and then stopped and asked, "And what do you think happened to the oysters? How does the story end?" Some hands waved wildly and some possible endings were suggested: the oysters ran away home; the oysters hid in their shells and dug into the sand and the ocean came in and "drowned" them. After several offerings, the teacher said, "Now Dick will pass out the paper and I want you all to write down what you think happened to the oysters." A few children wrote furiously; some chewed their pencils and gazed around the room; one boy was busy drawing trains; two little ones in the back row were playing tit-tat-toe. After about ten minutes, the teacher collected the papers. He did not read any but said that he would read the best ones the next day. Then he read them the last stanza of the poem. It was "flat." The children had lost interest. One said she did not like the ending. Several did not even listen to it.

**Criticism:** The whole situation seemed unnatural and pedantic. The eager interest

of the children for the story was dampened by the defining and writing out of word meanings. Besides, words like "frothy" and "beseeching" sound just as they should sound in the poem, regardless of their meaning. I wondered what this teacher would do with the "Jabberwocky." The idea of reading all the way to the last stanza and stopping there was exasperating. Motivating by reading only part of a story and imagining the ending is fun occasionally, especially as a group experience with each one telling how he thinks the story should end. However, a story should be selected that has a natural break before the conclusion. Also, children enjoy having their story-endings read aloud to the class. Some of the little ones in the class I observed tried to read their conclusions to their friends while the teacher was reading Mr. Carroll's last stanza. And last, but not least, a poem should be ended as a poem, not as prose.

#### *Socialized Writing*

The period before I visited a second-grade class whose teacher believes in "socialized writing," the class had been on a visit to the principal's office. Evidently it had been a stimulating experience and the children were excitedly telling the teacher what they had seen. She wrote on the blackboard exactly what each volunteer dictated, her only stipulation being that it must be a complete sentence. When everyone had had a chance, there were seven sentences on the blackboard: "We saw the telephone board," "We had a drink," "We saw Miss Smith," "We saw Mr. Henley," "We saw the big chart for absence," "We went to the office," "We saw Miss Smith making letters," "We had cookies." The

teacher then asked if those sentences could not be rearranged to make a better report of the visit. The children suggested the changes. When the teacher read the final report, everyone was so proud and pleased with how it sounded.

**Criticism:** This way of giving the children some new experience and then letting them tell about it while the excitement is still fresh in their minds seems to me very good. The teacher, in accepting whatever the children asked her to write, gave them confidence and made the writing of the report fun. Having no fear of being criticized and no frustration on being corrected, the children were able to express themselves easily and freely.

This same teacher also has a "rhyming game" for the children as a stimulus for group writing. When some special day, Hollowe'en for instance, is approaching, she starts the class off with one word on the blackboard, "moon," for example. The children think up rhyming words for "moon,"—"doom," "gloom," "broom," "boom," "loom." When they have a list of fine rhyming words written on the board, the children try to make a rhyme about Hollowe'en. She says the children love it and that very often the results are amazingly good. Her children love to write and frequently request "some writing time today, please."

#### *Individual Writing*

Another third-grade teacher I talked with has writing periods "whenever the mood is on them." She believes that children, like adults, should write only when they feel like writing. She combines reading, drawing, finger painting, pasting, and

writing stories all in the same period, each child doing whichever he feels like doing. At the beginning of the period she says, "Who has a story he wants to write today?" Usually there are three or four who want to write and they go to the writing table and write whatever they have in their minds. However, sometimes there are some who want to write but just can't think what they want to write about. To these, this teacher gives what she calls "a mental nudge." She starts them off with a sentence like, "Was my face red this morning when my father said. . . . ."; and with a giggle, some youngster clutches his pencil and starts off. Then, "There was a funny noise outside my window last night and when I opened the door this morning. . . . ."; and another young scribe is off. She says it is great fun to see their eyes start to sparkle as the sentences catches fire and their story begins to crackle in their heads.

*Criticism:* I am sure that in this easy-going atmosphere with this genial, enthusiastic teacher, a child will naturally find writing very satisfying. He gets praise for whatever he writes at the time he writes it. If he wants his writing read aloud to the group, his teacher sees that he has his audience or reads it aloud for him. He is allowed to write whatever is in his head or his heart, knowing that whatever he writes will be accepted and understood by his teacher. He knows she is always there to help him to get started or to give him the word he can't think of or even just to give him the assurance he needs to keep going.

#### *Writing Corner*

A second-grade teacher whom I visited

divides her class into small groups for writing and lets them write about anything they want to write. If any one cannot think up anything to write, he may draw pictures or read. She encourages the children to write and never criticizes them at the time of writing. Later, next day or the day after, she may suggest a different spelling or word, but at the moment of creation, the masterpiece is accepted as it is. If the child wants to read his story to the class, that is his privilege. If he wants the teacher to read it for him, she always grants his request. She takes the children on trips to give them something to think about, but she says she is never surprised if a trip to the zoo brings her a story of a child's sick puppy. She thinks children are natural rhymesters and says her groups love to make long rhymes. An experiment that she says has turned out very well is her "writing corner" in the classroom. This corner is separated from the rest of the room by a bamboo screen and has a table, four chairs, a child's dictionary, attractive pictures, lots of paper and pencils, and a pencil shaper. Any child who feels the urge to write gets her permission to go to the "writing corner." Sometimes he works there alone; sometimes two or three others are working there too. Everyone understands that the "writing corner" is for writing only, not for playing or reading or fooling. The teacher says she has no trouble with discipline or with children's wasting time or materials in the "writing corner." Often a child has gone to the "writing corner" to write out his resentment, his anger, his sorrow, his hurt, his loneliness, and has felt much happier after the teacher has read what he has written.

and given him the smile or the pat or the word of encouragement that he needed.

*Criticism:* This seems to me a splendid experience not only for creative writing but for self-discipline for growing children. Their individuality is respected; their needs are taken into consideration; their confidence is built up. The teacher guides them, helps them, but does not criticize them in their efforts at self-expression.

#### *Writing through Dictation*

Last, but not least, I would like to share what I learned through talking with a Kindergarten-Primary teacher. She says the very little ones like to tell their stories to her while she types them out. While the other children are busy drawing, playing games, coloring with crayons, one youngster will come to her voluntarily and say, "I got a story today." She sits him on the corner of her desk and lets him tell the story while she takes it down on her typewriter. She says it usually takes about five minutes for a story, and some days she has as many as three or four of these creative writers during a morning session; other days perhaps only one. Usually, the children want their stories read aloud to the other children. Sometimes the hearing of the story starts another child's thinking of a story that he wants to tell. When I asked

if the typewriter did not bother the little story-tellers, the teacher said that at first the typing intrigued them so much that they forgot their stories sometimes but that now they were all accustomed to the machine and paid no attention to it. She chuckled as she added that children don't pay any attention to her either. She is merely a recording machine. The all important thing to them is to get the story written down.

In conclusion, it would seem that these several observations and interviews develop a natural rating scale from Destructive, Partly Constructive, Almost Wholly Constructive, to Highly Constructive. For a constructive writing program, the teacher should arrange for an individual or small group writing time whenever one is desirable. She should recognize her role as guiding and helping, not coercing and criticizing. She should be always sympathetic and understanding, knowing full well that the purpose of the writing period is to help the child to unfold and express himself freely with the confidence of knowing that whatever he writes will be accepted at the time, even though some minor changes may be suggested later. With such a program, children learn that writing is just as much fun as talking and often much more satisfying.

# *Spelling Is What You Make It*

ROSANNA D. WITHEROW<sup>1</sup>

As a child I hated spelling. I couldn't spell. But at our house perfection in schoolwork came first. Night after night Mother and I tearfully pursued my spelling book. I can still remember the sound of the other children shouting and laughing as they slid in our lane. Poor me! Poor Mother!

I never learned to spell, but one good thing came of those sessions at our kitchen table; my students do their spelling at school. I have tried a number of ways of helping them and last year we tried something new.

The class was a combined third and fourth grade in the primary room of a rural school. The first and second grade children were in the same room. The entire enrollment was thirty-eight children. Seventeen children took an active part in the experiment. We say active for the entire room listened and often joined in the fun.

On the first day of school we began to talk about the words we would need to spell before we could begin our first week of work.

If you are still laboring under the false belief that our children do not know what they need, consider their first list:

September	bus	dress	squirrel
first	car	shoes	o'clock
day	walk	socks	seven
school	truck	hair cut	sleepy
breakfast	new	glasses	flowers

It makes you smile, doesn't it? They had been having real experiences. They wanted to be ready to talk about them, and

what is more important, to write about them. In this list the teacher made no suggestions. Later it was sometimes necessary to do a little lobbying, but there was never a time when the teacher made an out and out suggestion for the final lists.

A part of the blackboard was set aside and a new list was always growing. If a child found a new word, he checked the spelling and put it on the board. If someone needed help with a word it was added. Out of the three hundred words spelled not one was an unused word.

Spelling of a new list began with discussion. We talked about meanings and the number of ways in which the word could be used. If the word was going to be difficult to spell we talked about that too. The children never wanted to take a word out of the list just because it was hard to spell. The teacher let the way open several times for them to discard the word "refrigerator," but, even when half of them missed it, they still wanted to keep it. Here in the country a new electric refrigerator is quite a step up from the old spring house.

An important part of the work was sentence making. They were prepared at home or while the teacher was busy with the younger children. At class time, taking turns, the children offered their sentences. A sentence was examined for content, use of the word, and general interest. Some-

<sup>1</sup>A teacher in the Clearfield County (Pa.) Public Schools.

times a sentence would be accepted just as it was. Often several sentences would be discussed and the final sentence would be a combination of ideas. When everyone was satisfied that it was the best we could do the teacher put it on the board.

Several children made copies so that we would have a permanent record. Children who found copying from the board a burden were not required to do it. Cathy, who never could learn to spell all the words, was a beautiful writer. She made copies for the other children. This gave her an important part and she loved it.

As soon as we were well acquainted with the words we spelled them. This spelling was carefully checked. Each child found his own mistakes and marked them. The children who spelled perfectly the first time helped those who didn't. Mis-spelled words were studied in every way we knew. At the end of the week we spelled again. This mark was recorded.

We made little games and contests. Even the first and second grade helped with this one. We divided off into teams. Each team kept a list of spelling words found in outside reading. No list would be considered until they could tell the story well, thus proving they had actually read it. This led to an unbelievable flurry of independent reading. It was like magic.

Another game we played like this: when writing your sentences you received one point for using a word from the current list, but if you used a word from an old list you were given five points. The one disadvantage of this game was writing a sentence just to get the word in. However, there was a check. Only a sentence that

could satisfy the class in content, word use, and interest was put on the board. To get one's sentence in the final record was always a first aim and some thinking was necessary.

When the weekly lists added up to one hundred words we began to re-test. Type-written copies were made by the teacher and dozens of them hectographed. There was never any worry about getting one's copy wet or forgetting it. One could always get a new copy. These lists were borrowed by the upper grades and everyone had fun spelling. It was a happy day if we could spell them down or an older brother or sister missed one of our words. The lists went all around the neighborhood, to picnics and family reunions to see if the cousins could spell them.

We worked out a chart showing the words that had been missed, and how often they had been missed. From this chart each child marked his own list. He then studied only the words that had given him trouble. He marked the beginning sound, the endings, the root word. He syllabified and found definitions. When it helped we used the kinesthetic method. Again the child who could spell helped the others. By the time we were ready for a final re-testing of the hundred words the children had reached the limit of their ability. That is all one has a right to ask.

Each time the children begged to have four or five words added to the list. This was to allow for missing a word or two and still spelling a hundred words. They loved to say, "I've spelled a hundred words!" It was a real thrill. A sort of "Derby Day" for all of us. The lower

grades were cheering for their favorites. Even the children who knew they couldn't hope to spell all the words were betting on their friends.

A very satisfying outcome was that we were all growing in so many other ways. More was being measured than spelling ability. We never allowed ourselves to forget that Cathy could make beautiful copies and that Clifford could often think of the best sentences. The least that any child in

the room could learn was that he needed to spell. That in itself is well worth while.

This was in no way a technical study. We did not try to measure if the children's accomplishment fluctuated from other years. There was no check on the grade level of the words. The County Office gave every possible help and did the final testing. We did not think about the course of study. We forgot the "Old Demons." All we did was spell and spell and spell. We had Fun!

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## *An Individualized Reading Program for the Elementary Teacher*

N. DEAN EVANS<sup>1</sup>

With television, the movies, youth organizations and other aspects of modern life making their demands on the time of today's children, the elementary teacher is faced with the necessity of developing an interesting, stimulating reading program that will encourage the child to recognize the values and pleasures to be found in books.

Recent research has proven rather conclusively that the traditional "group" method of teaching reading fails to maintain the interest of the child and is furthermore an inefficient way of using the limited time available to most teachers for reading instruction.

The individualized reading program is a workable, satisfying solution to the problem of meeting the needs of children in reading. It is the purpose of this article to

discuss the merits and techniques of the individual method.

Basic to the success of an individualized reading program is the philosophy that children should learn to assume considerable self-direction and control as they mature. Only when the pupils in a class have developed to the point where they can read and work independently for short periods without constant direct teacher supervision can this program have any chance for success. Individualized reading may be initiated in any grade, from one to six, when the above criteria have been realized.

Certain materials are essential before this program can be initiated. A wide variety of books must be readily available in

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Evans is President of the Springfield Twp., Teachers Association, Springfield, Pennsylvania.

the classroom or in the school library. It is desirable to have eight or ten copies of a number of good basal readers. In addition there should be as many fiction and non-fiction books on different levels as the teacher and children can accumulate. The pupils can be urged to bring in their books to share with the group. Bookmobiles or county circulating libraries are often able to supplement the school or class library. Many public libraries are happy to lend 50 or 60 books to a teacher for use in the reading classes. And parent-teacher groups often purchase additional books for schools. At any rate, a good selection of readers and outside reading materials are essential to the success of an individualized program.

It is necessary that pupils be oriented to the several procedures, particularly if they are intermediate grade children who have been used to "grouping" in reading. Each individual in the class must realize that his progress in reading depends on his own efforts and that a certain independence is required. Self-selection of reading materials is the key to individualized reading, so children should understand that they are to have in their possession at all times a book of their own choice. Each child also is encouraged to keep a record in his notebook of the reading he does. A notation of title and author and a brief comment on each book or article or story read is sufficient. Those pupils with word trouble should be urged also to keep a vocabulary list, to which they add as they read. Finally the students should understand that the teacher will help them to improve their reading through individual and group references.

After orientation of the children, the program involves the following activities:

1. Individual conferences of from 3 to 10 minutes between teacher and child.
2. Silent reading in books or stories of the child's own choice.
3. Teaching sessions with small groups.
4. Children who have selected the same story reading and discussing together in small groups.
5. A short period in which children spontaneously talk about books and stories they have just read, with the thought that others in the class might be interested in reading them also. The entire class participates in this activity.
6. Some children working on or studying reading lists and vocabulary lists discussed above.
7. Creative work growing out of common reading may be going on in small groups. For instance, some children may be preparing a play.

The flexibility of the individualized reading program is such that the teacher may use any combination of the above activities according to the needs of the children. Each of these procedures will now be discussed in some detail.

At the beginning of each reading period those children who need new books will do some browsing and exchanging in the class library. The other children will settle down to silent reading. With the class thus employed the teacher is free to begin some of the activities listed above.

*The Conference*  
In a reading program involving for

instance 5 daily periods of 45 minutes each per week, at least two of these periods should be devoted to the individual conference which is an outstanding feature of individualized reading. While the teacher is conferring with children one by one at her desk the remainder of the class are reading silently in their own books. Assuming a class size of 35 and an average of 5 minutes per conference, the teacher would be able to work with each child in this manner about once every two weeks. In these conferences the following things are accomplished:

1. The child's reading list and vocabulary list are checked to note his progress since the last conference. The teacher may discuss with the pupil some of the books and stories he has read.

(It should be noted here that it is necessary to maintain a card file or loose-leaf notebook with a card or page for each child. Here are noted previous reading test data; the date of each conference with observations made by the teacher; and a brief record of the child's reading since the last conference. This record is not difficult or time-consuming to maintain since the jottings are made during the conference or immediately thereafter.)

2. A second conference activity might be a discussion of the book the child is now reading and some oral reading by the pupil in a section he has already covered. Difficulties in word analysis and other skills can be pointed out to the child and a notation made on his card for future drill.

3. The child can be urged to tell part of the story he is reading or to discuss a particular part. Some idea of comprehension can be gained in this manner.
4. The teacher can guide the child into the selection of books suitable to his own level and interests. The better her knowledge of children's literature the more stimulating can be the help of the teacher in this regard. New books in the class library can be recommended, and through checking the child's reading list to date, a greater variety of reading can be encouraged.

A typical record on a child after two such conferences and a series of diagnostic reading tests might look something like this:

CAROL HIGGINS (6th grade)  
Oct. 27—Now reading *Robin Hood*, edited by G. C. Harvey. Seems to be getting quite a bit from her reading. Read well orally. No trouble with phonics.  
Nov. 13—No word list progress. No comments on book list; has listed titles and authors, however.

Has read *Madia's Little Shop*, *Madia's Little House*, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, *The Lost Locket*, *Babe Prays for a Miracle*. Now reading *Whispering Statue*. Oral reading good. No troubles.

Iowa Silent Reading Test—Form AM—81st percentile. Low only in rate & alphabet.

Weekly Reader Diagnostic test—High in all aspects.

(NOTE:—The reading tests can be administered periodically throughout the year to the entire class at one time.)

#### *Silent Reading*

When not in conference with the teacher or otherwise engaged in another activity, the child assumes the responsibility of reading at his seat. He may be busy with his library book or a particular exercise recommended by the teacher in a basic reader to improve one of his weaker areas. In any event when children learn to proceed quietly and directly to their own reading at the beginning of the period, the teacher can then begin the conferences and other features of the individual reading program.

#### *Work-study Skill Sessions*

On one of the days when conferences are not being held, the teacher may call up to the front of the room at different times groups of children who are having trouble in certain areas. The makeup of these groups will depend on the notes made in the conferences, and diagnostic reading test data. As the rest of class continues silent reading, the teacher stresses the specific skills only to those who have shown need. In this way children who already have mastered certain skills are not made to sit through unneeded instruction. Certain sections of the basic readers and the content books can be effectively used to teach the work-study skills.

#### *Group Reading*

By calling attention to some of the stories in the various basic readers available in the room, the teacher may get a group of students interested in reading a particular story. Afterwards a group discus-

sion can be held or short summaries may be written.

For certain teachers, particularly in the primary grades, who feel that much of the basic vocabulary must be learned through the basic reader, several sessions per week in the readers could be scheduled. However, in lieu of the boring and stereotyped daily workbook lessons some of the individualized program activities being discussed here might be utilized to much better advantage. And the children will not come to abhor reading in the process. It should be pointed out also that much basic vocabulary can be taught through other phases of the language arts program. Therefore the teacher would have more latitude in the use of the basic readers and all children would not be forced to read every story regardless of their interests.

#### *Sharing Books*

The last ten minutes of several periods per week can be spent in a class activity where all the pupils share their reading experiences. Children will rise eagerly to tell something about the story or book they have just read, because it has been a selection that they made themselves. In this manner it is surprising how much motivation for future reading takes place without the teacher participating at all. What a contrast between this method and the formalized book report which deadens interest in reading and incurs the enmity of the child! The teacher can also say a few words at this time about some of the books she has read, and put in a few "plugs" for stories she thinks the children might enjoy.

#### *Reading and Vocabulary Lists*

Some children during the period will be bringing their reading lists up-to-date.

The information desired on these sheets has already been indicated. The comments made by the child on each selection read should reflect his reaction to the book, article, or story. This method of recording is so easy that the children will actually enjoy seeing their lists grow.

The vocabulary lists are somewhat more difficult to compile. As the child reads, he hesitates to stop and look up words that he cannot figure out from the context. Understandably he does not want to break the continuity of the story. A solution is the use of a blank piece of paper for a bookmark. On this can be recorded hard words and the page number. When he finds a good stopping place the child can look up the words and transfer them, with their meanings, to his notebook for further study. He can then check the words in their context to fill in his comprehension of the passage he has just read. On the other hand, some children will prefer to look up words as they come to them. The extent to which this technique is used will depend on the teacher's philosophy of vocabulary development.

#### *Creative Work*

Some of the children, particularly the good readers, can be guided into some skit or play work, based on the common reading of a book or story. Such activities will suggest themselves after the remainder of the program is functioning smoothly, and the teacher has a little time to observe the individual pupils at work.

Before summarizing the advantages of the individualized reading program, a word about evaluation is indicated. Although the teacher won't have a great list

of workbook marks for each child, a more sound evaluation of the children's progress in reading is possible if the above procedures are carried out. Interpretation of a pupil's work in terms of grades or marks will of course depend on the grading system used by the teacher or school concerned.

#### *Advantages of the Individualized Reading Program*

1. The psychological effect of the program on the child is favorable. Pressures and tensions to meet standards of a traditional reading group are eliminated. There is no stigma about what is read or the amount of material covered. Group competition is minimized.
2. Actually an individual program results in consistently larger amounts of material being read.
3. Reading speed is accelerated.
4. The amount of time spent actually reading is increased and consequently more words are learned through the context.
5. The program is flexible and provides maximum efficiency in the use of time. The teacher really has more time to spend with each child.
6. Undesirable attitudes toward reading are eliminated.
7. The entire reading time is devoted to the individual child, his problems and interests. Slow readers get results. Fast readers enjoy their reading.

#### *Children's Evaluations*

Teachers who have initiated the individualized method invariably get tremendous positive response from the chil-

dren. Following are typical comments from a 6th grade class after several months of individualized reading.

"I like the way of selecting your own books. Somebody doesn't push a book in front of you and say that you have to read it."

"I like the books up in the front of the room. Gee, it's just like a regular library."

"Sometimes before when we *had* to read reading books all the time and answer questions every day, I used to dread reading class. Now I look forward to it."

"I like keeping my own word list. If I just read along without putting them down, I wouldn't learn new words. And it doesn't interrupt my reading."

"I like the conferences because you know where you stand in reading."

"I like selecting my own books."

"It's not very good to be in a group. Some people read faster than others and you don't have anything to do but sit around half the time."

"A lot of those reading books are boring when you have to answer questions all the time at the end of the story."

"I think the conference is a good idea.

If you don't understand something, the teacher helps you."

"I feel freer talking to the teacher in a conference than I did in a group."

"It's good to have a word list and a book list. I know what I've done."

Those teachers who have successfully carried out the individualized plan of reading could add many more like comments to this list.

The teacher who would try this program must first have the objectives and techniques well in mind. The necessary materials must be at hand. But above all else the teacher should realize that individualized reading must be developed gradually especially in the primary grades. Parts of the program may be adopted as the children are ready for them. If the class has been used to a group approach, the individualized program may be worked in by degrees. Always the teacher must keep in mind the level of maturation of her children and such factors as their attention span.

But to the teacher who will conscientiously develop an individual reading program comes the grateful thanks of children improving their skills and really enjoying reading at the same time.

## *High Interest, Low Ability Level Reading Materials*

WALTER B. BARBE<sup>1</sup>

The number of children in any classroom who are unable to read the materials at that particular grade level is surprisingly great. It would be a conservative estimate to say that in an average elementary classroom, about one-fourth of the pupils are reading an entire year below their actual grade placement. There are also many children in the classroom who are at the other extreme and can read a year or more above their grade placement. This diversity of ability within a single classroom creates a real problem.

It has been stated that the range in reading ability in an intermediate grade classroom is probably seven years. With a limited amount of reading material, it is obvious that many of the children will either be unable to read, or be uninterested in the content of material at the level at which they can read. The problem that the teacher has faced for many years is in selecting materials which require reading ability below that of the regular grade, but of sufficient interest to a child who cannot read up to his grade level.

It is now relatively easy for a teacher to determine the child's level of reading ability. Knowing what course of action to follow after a child has been identified as a poor reader, while not always easy, is nevertheless not as difficult as locating materials in which he will be interested. The child who is a poor reader is usually

very conscious of his difficulty and will not willingly read from a book of a lower grade level even if the content happens to interest him. Usually the content of lower level materials does not interest a child, however.

Recently, while attempting to diagnose a reading difficulty, a teacher asked a child to read from readers of various levels. A particular series was used because the child had quickly recognized the lines denoting the grade levels of another series which was also before the child. Going through these readers, the child's first comment was, "You'd think that I could read this second grade book, because I am really in the fourth grade." There were absolutely no markings to indicate that the reader was of second grade level, but the child was so conscious of size of type, illustrations, and even vocabulary that he was able to correctly identify the level of every book from the first grade through the sixth even though he could not read above the first grade level. The fact that the child could do this proved that his teacher had attempted to give him readers at a level which he could read. Because of the uninteresting material for a fourth grade child in a book a year below his level, the child had made no progress.

Actually the teacher had been following the soundest principle of modern education. She was attempting to use a de-

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velopmental approach, beginning with the child at his level. The only mistake that the teacher had made, and it was a disastrous one, was in failing to locate materials of interest to the child. This mistake is not an uncommon one and the blame cannot fall upon the teacher, because there is a relatively limited supply of materials of high interest and low ability level for poor readers. The need for such materials is very great.

*Description of High Interest—Low Ability Level Materials*

The question may justifiably be asked, "What are high interest, low ability level materials?" The characteristics of these materials are:

- (1) Vocabulary level low, sentence structure less complex.
- (2) Content of interest to children several years older than vocabulary level.
- (3) Size of print typical of child's actual grade, instead of the larger print used for younger children.
- (4) General appearance of the book cover, the binding, and illustrations characteristic of materials at the child's actual grade placement.
- (5) Plot somewhat simplified, not too many characters, fast moving events, rapid conclusion.

Obviously not all materials are suitable for re-writing at the lower level. The child who has had reading difficulty needs material which will fire his interest in reading by providing exciting, fast moving experiences which he can enjoy vicariously. While almost all children need material of this type, the poor reader has had an unpleasant initial experience and it will take the best of materials to arouse his interest. Books that are just "good" are not suitable for him. He needs the very best literature that is available.

The idea behind providing materials of high interest level with lower ability level requirements is to provide the child with successful experiences in reading materials, of which he does not have to be ashamed because it is "baby stuff." The fact that the fifth grade child can only read at the primer level does not mean that he will enjoy the "Oh, Oh, look, look, look!" variety of reading material.

*Low Vocabulary Level.* The vocabulary used in all of the modern readers is carefully controlled. Not only must the author be certain that every word used in a reader is not above a certain level, but he must also be aware of the number of times that the word is repeated. Extensive scientific studies have been made to determine the exact level at which the child normally learns to read each new word, and no word is put into a reader if it is above the level at which the book is being written.

In the writing of low ability, high interest level materials, the vocabulary is even more carefully controlled. It is of a lower level, however, than would normally be used. If the material is being written for sixth grade students with third grade reading levels. It would never be used for a child in the sixth grade who was reading up to his level.

*High Interest Level.* Developing materials with low vocabulary level, but high interest level is quite difficult. Obviously, part of the higher interest level is due to the vocabulary level. The approach used is to develop the story around those interests found to be the strongest at the higher grade level. It is a difficult task and some of the materials advertised as being of

high interest level but low ability level are not actually interesting to an older child.

*Size of Print.* Children are very conscious of the size of print in their readers after they pass the third grade, when the print reaches a consistent size. After trying to read materials at the size used in the sixth grade, the child is not going to go back to larger print without realizing that he is reading "baby" material. The social pressure attached to reading material at least similar in appearance to that of the other students is very strong. Poor readers in particular are aware of the fact that the only material that they can read is in the larger print. The child avoids this embarrassment by refusing to read anything.

*General Appearance of Materials.* Along with the size of the print goes the general appearance of the book. First and second grade books simply look like first and second grade books. Children know this and will ridicule a child who is reading from material which is obviously of a much lower level. The size of the book itself is somewhat indicative of its level. The binding and illustrations have rather distinctive characteristics at the different grade levels. The general format of primary material is quite unlike that of intermediate grade material. In developing materials to be used with poor readers, the format must be characteristic of a level high enough so that the child will not be ashamed.

*Plot.* Obviously, the poor reader is not going to claim reading as his favorite pastime. Even with easier materials, he is going to remember the unhappiness con-

nected with reading. Therefore, materials for poor readers have to be better than those for average readers. It isn't enough that *most* of the materials be vitally interesting to the child, they must *all* be. The plot must be somewhat simplified, there must not be too many characters, and the story should not be too long. Such a child, who has known nothing but failure in reading, must learn that the results of reading are worthwhile. If the materials are of not too difficult a level he will come to enjoy the process as well.

#### *Classics Rewritten*

The materials which are being discussed are not the classics which have been rewritten at a lower level. While the technique used is the same as that being discussed, the materials are not. To simplify the classics so that they are forever ruined for the child is not a commendable procedure. The child who finds reading difficult is not ready for the classics in any form, rewritten or otherwise.

#### *Examples of High Interest — Low Ability Materials*

An excellent example of materials which are suitable for children of low ability level but high interest level are the Reader's Digest, Reading Skill Builder Series. These materials, written at the third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade levels are, with the exception of the third grade level, interesting to children through high school. The third grade level has larger print and deviates from the ordinary *Reader's Digest* format. The other materials in the series follow the well known format of the regular *Reader's Digest*. The contents, taken from other magazines as are the articles in the adult edition, are interesting.

The vocabulary is controlled at the level for which the books are intended. While these materials were not primarily intended for poor readers, they are serving this purpose extremely well. Unfortunately they are not issued monthly as the regular magazine is. There are two at each of the grade levels from third through sixth. At least a few copies of each of these would be most helpful in any intermediate or junior high classroom.

Recently, one publishing company has begun work on rewriting its readers at a lower level. This means that, for example, the fourth grade reader will be at two levels—one, for use with the regular group, will be at fourth grade level of dif-

ficulty while the other, for use with children having difficulty in reading, will be at about middle second grade level. The stories are the same, which means that the readiness activities introducing the story need not differ for the slow group. Questions in the teacher's manual may be answered from content in either level of the reader. The difference is not in the story itself, but in the grade level of the vocabulary used. If such materials are successful, and it is inconceivable that they will not readily be accepted by teachers, it is likely that such materials will be prepared in the content fields. It is perhaps in such areas as the social studies and sciences that the need for easier materials is greatest.

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## A "Fact Festival"

LOUISE E. SHEPPARD<sup>1</sup>

Just recently, a survey was made of our public schools to determine what parents and the general public alike expected from us as teachers and educators. Among the many responses given to various questions, there was one point upon which all agreed—more emphasis should be placed upon skills and the 3 R's.

However, long before the results of this survey were published, the teachers of our school had felt the need for more stress upon informational reading and a more intensive skills program. In a school of more than 1200 children launching such a project becomes quite a problem.

### *The Library Steps In*

No librarian would fail to see this need and seize the opportunity offered in such

a project. And so, no time was lost in helping to launch the "Skills and Informational Reading Program." During the summer months this project was mulled over, and several important questions were always in the forefront. How could we launch such a program to serve the best need? How could we begin to plan in July for a September program with little or no knowledge as to what the classroom centers of interest were to be? What would be the first steps in advertising such a project? These and other questions frequently haunted us because we knew a publicity campaign had to be planned, materials organized and selected, and a schedule of activities prepared.

<sup>1</sup>Librarian, School No. 112, Baltimore, Md.

Sometime ago a friend, our physical education teacher, sent me an article to read. This article formed the nucleus idea for the campaign. Why not organize all the library materials available upon certain units and plan to display them to each class studying the unit? In this way, teachers and pupils could see, handle, and borrow a variety of materials. A list was made of all probable units of work which might be carried on in each grade from the first through the sixth, including the occupational classes. Then, we collected all the library materials such as pictures, posters, maps, pamphlets, magazines, books, and clippings centered around the units listed. In addition, letters were written to many companies requesting any free materials which could be utilized by our classes.

#### *Spreading The News*

A great deal of the success of any project depends to a large extent upon the kind and quality of publicity given it. Much had to be done to stimulate interest and gain teacher-pupil participation. During the first week of school, a circular letter was sent to each teacher, asking her support in our Library Aide Training Program. Each teacher was asked to send the names of six children who could be used to help in the library. A general meeting of all helpers was immediately called, and various tasks were assigned. We hit upon the idea of calling our campaign a "Fact Festival." Stickers, in the form of fall leaves with legs, were drawn, cut, and posted throughout the school. Some of the slogans read, "Visit the Fact Festival in The Library"; "Facts Are Fun"; "A Festival of Facts is Waiting For You"; etc. A bulletin board was arranged inside the li-

brary. Outside, over the door, was a red barrel saying, "Our Library—A Barrel of Facts and Fun." The school became "Fact Festival" conscious.

As a follow-up, another circular, explaining the purpose of the festival and how materials were to be organized and displayed, was placed in each teacher's mailbox. Teachers were asked to send to the library the name of the unit of work being studied. Time was the important factor as we were eager for them to see and secure the materials they needed. An invitation, which included the date and hour, was sent to the children of various classes to visit the library and browse among the materials on display. All the materials were spread out upon the library tables. Each day's exhibit was given a name such as "Sight-Seeing in Brazil," "Colonial Cues," "Farm Fun Today," "Congo Capers," and many others.

#### *Festival Fun*

Both teachers and pupils examined, took notes, and borrowed what they felt could be used in their classrooms. During the library period the meaning of "Fact Festival" was developed, and informational books were introduced. There was a directed discussion of the materials and how they could be used. Several classes were told stories upon the unit displayed and led to select facts found in the stories. After each period, the library was cleared and another display set up. This continued until all classes had seen the exhibit in which it was interested.

#### *What's Next*

Many teachers saw the definite advantages of the festival and cooperated fully. The principal, vice principal, and super-

visors had a chance to visit the library during this time. Teachers and librarian held frequent conferences to plan follow-up-activities in the library and in the classrooms. The teachers suggested ways of using books and other materials and then made requests for future library periods. There were many follow-up activities, among which were writing original stories based upon facts; dramatizing stories by means of puppets; making bulletin board displays

in classrooms, using jackets of books borrowed; writing captions for pictures; writing a play on informational books, and many others. We kept a record of each follow-up activity. The cooperation and enthusiasm of teachers and pupils was most gratifying to each of us. As a result of the campaign, we hope that a greater interest in informational books has been stimulated and that pupils will gain skill in handling the study tools of the library.

## Modern Biographies for Children

GAITHER MCCONNELL<sup>1</sup>

The field of biography is one of the most important parts of modern children's literature. Because of its predominant place in recent publishing and because of its potential effects for good or ill in the child's or adolescent's life, some studies of available biography should be of value to teacher and parent. The following paragraphs report a survey of 391 current biographies written for children and youth.

The extensiveness of the offerings in the field was investigated to determine the types of subjects whose lives are available for children to read. The investigation was limited to those biographies of sufficient merit to be recommended by sources from which books, made fairly accessible to children, are frequently selected. The sources chosen and the number of individual biographies recommended by each are:

Source	Number of Biographies Mentioned on List
1. American Library Association. <i>A Basic Book Collection for Elementary Grades</i> . American Library Association, Chicago, 1943.	

36

2. Association for Childhood Education. <i>Bibliography of Books for Children</i> (1948 edition). The Association, Washington, D. C., 1947.	66
3. Beust, Nora (comp.). <i>500 Books for Children</i> . United States Office of Education, Bulletin 1939, No. 11. United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1940. (Also Supplement, 1945).	34
4. Giles, Ruth, Cook, Dorothy, West, Dorothy (comps.). <i>Children's Catalog</i> (7th. ed. rev.) H. W. Wilson Company, New York, 1946. (Also Supplement 1947-1949).	305
5. Eaton, Anne T. <i>Treasure for the Taking</i> . The Viking Press, New York, 1946.	60

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor of Education, Newcomb College, Tulane University, New Orleans, La. The research here reported was carried on with the aid of the Berneta Minkwitz National Scholarship of Delta Kappa Gamma, Honor Society in Education.

The survey of the 391 biographies showed that there is a wide range of biographies available for children. Of the 391 titles, 37 are autobiographies and 354 are biographies by single or joint authors.

The 247 subjects were classified according to occupational groups and according to sex as

Since children are interested in men and

women of action, it is not surprising that a large group of biographies have as subjects pioneers, colonizers, explorers, and soldiers, sailors, and patriots. Hero worship and the influence of the schools in calling attention to heroic and patriotic figures may account for the number of biographies in the groups mentioned and also for the large number of biographies about statesmen. Many of the biographies have as subjects those individuals on whom the school curricula have centered attention.

In addition to the almost complete roster of the most honored and popular American statesmen, there are biographies of some fairly recent statesmen from other parts of the world. Children may read the lives of Winston Churchill of England, Benito Juárez of Mexico, Vladimir Lenin of Russia, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Sun Yat-sen of China, and Giuseppe Garibaldi of Italy.

If the subjects representing the occupations which indicate the creative life, i. e., artists, musicians, writers, and perhaps scientists, are considered as a group, an almost dominating interest in this phase of human activity is seen.

The majority of the biographees are well-known men and women who have lived since the year 1700. Specialists in the fields of adult and juvenile biography generally agree that "great" men are more desirable as biographical subjects than "small" men. It is of interest that the biographies of recent heroes such as Dwight Eisenhower, Douglas MacArthur, and Sergeant Alvin York appear along with those of time-honored military men.

Three subjects in the large group have lived entirely in the twentieth century: Lou Gehrig, athlete, and Charles Lindbergh and Robert Scott, aviators. Among the subjects of interest who lived before the eighteenth century are: Gutenberg, inventor; Stradivari, violin maker; Pierre de Bayard, soldier; Pocahontas, Indian "princess"; and Cervantes, writer. Each stands

alone in his occupational group, all other subjects in the group being in the 1700-1950 period.

Since the method of writing and the treatment of subjects in biographies has changed rather radically within the past thirty years, it is not surprising that recently published biographies predominate on the list of highly recommended biographies.

The fields in which the greatest numbers of recommended biographies published during the last three years of the 1940's have appeared are: inventors, philanthropists, social workers, educators, colonizers, soldiers, sailors, patriots, and statesmen.

The recommended biographies of only two musicians and three writers have been published in 1947, 1948, and 1949.

The lives of some individuals have been written by different authors. Among the 391 recommended biographies, four or more lives have been published about each of fourteen subjects. An examination of the approximate level of reading difficulty of these biographies, as stated in some of the sources, suggests that a new life of a subject may not only present a new treatment or different approach, but may be written for a different group of child readers. For example, of nine recommended biographies of Daniel Boone four range approximately from the sixth through the ninth grade level and five from the third through the sixth grade level of reading difficulty; different biographies of Boone are suitable for children with different reading ability.

The results of this survey of the field of juvenile biography suggest that the following needs or changes in the field should be given attention:

1. There are still *good* biographies to be written of some popular heroes whose lives are full enough of action and adventure to appeal to children.

2. Some better written biographies of popular and well-known individuals are needed.

3. A number of individuals, whose lives and careers are interesting and significant enough to recommend them to the attention of children, have not yet had the proper biographical treatment. Although their lives have been written and are among the biographies on the list surveyed, many of them are among the least recommended biographies.

4. There is a need for more biographies for younger readers—those under twelve years of age. There are a few highly recommended ones for that age group, but not enough. There is a need for those on the comprehension level of the child as well as on his reading level.

5. There should be more biographies of women so that girls can identify more often and more easily with the central figures of the biographies.

6. The lives of some well-known subjects, who are currently interesting, should have a more modern treatment. No new biographies of some subjects on the list surveyed have been written during the past thirty years. Many early biographies have been retained on some of the more comprehensive recommending sources because they are the only biographies available of some historically important individuals.

7. A study of the interests of children in foreign subjects would be of value. Are children not interested in foreign subjects, or is it just that the lives of foreign subjects either have not been written, or have not been interestingly presented?

8. Of interest, also, would be a study of the preferences of children for well-known and less known or obscure individuals as subjects of biographies.

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## *Just Try to Beat the Dutch in Language Arts!*

RALPH H. LANE<sup>1</sup>

Casual travelers from the United States hear so much better English in the Netherlands than in their own country that they always marvel. The modest Dutch explain, almost apologetically, "Our geographical position makes language-study imperative."

When the Americans have recovered from their shame and have settled down to embarrassment with their own slangy speech, they suddenly realize that their hosts are equally capable in German and French—besides, of course, standard Dutch and possibly a dialect. Then the

Americans suspect that language teaching in the Netherlands rests upon a better basis than in their own land. The only alternative is to accord the Dutch population a special linguistic ability—a most improbable circumstance. Detractors may say, "But a scant twenty-five per cent of the Dutch have such an advantage from the highly selective schools." The success of the few still is astounding, for our own top quarter never learn *one* language well.

<sup>1</sup>Wilson Teachers College, Washington, D. C. Readers who disagree with the viewpoint or interpretation presented in this article are invited to contribute responses.

A bright Dutch boy is only twelve when he begins the concurrent study of three or five foreign languages, and he must have an IQ of 120 or above if he is to succeed. Long before that time, however, the elementary schools have laid solid foundations for his linguistic studies and for the more general training of his less intelligent fellow-pupils. Very important things happen in the first year of elementary school, and from these things the entire population profits in literacy. In fact, "remedial reading" is unknown except in atypical schools, and one never encounters the illiterate but respectable executive. Jerry-building and later patch-work are not popular because the Dutch build for permanence.

"How do they do it?" you may ask.

It is quite simple, the elementary teachers say. They can outline the entire process within fifteen minutes.

With the exception of a very few of the experimental sort, most Dutch lower schools follow a general procedure which has become almost traditional, although it indeed permits ample freedom for adaptation to both the pupils and teachers concerned. Instead of tricking the children into speaking, reading, and writing, the teacher openly makes those activities a primary goal. Instead of hoping, cajoling, and coaxing, the teacher frankly *expects* the pupil to perform. Her attitude is old-fashioned, you will say. But since the new fashion is inefficient, there are grounds for re-considering a successful approach. Reading, upon which the language-study centers, is not considered a mysterious skill that one acquires unconsciously; it is, rather, a skill which results from assiduous

application. Language-study in general is not prettified as an "art" demanding special talent (as in the United States, where change of name often is mistaken for change in the thing itself), but it is treated as a science, mastery of which depends upon the learner's gift and his industry.

Since reading is the heart (and not a by-product) of the program, you might like to know how it is taught. The approach is phonetic-visual, the stress being at first applied to the auditory aspect of language, but then gradually shifting to the recorded sounds (although at no time is the weight disproportionate).

At the beginning of his study of language (and of reading, in particular), the child finds a large mounted chart in the front of the room. On this chart are colored pictures of familiar objects, with their one-syllable names in large letters beneath, all so chosen as to provide conversational and narrative material and at the same time to illustrate every sound in the language. On his own desk is a smaller duplicate of this chart, mounted on a board; and each child also has a box of stout pasteboards, on which are printed single letters and digraphs, for matching exercises. There are available many sets of cards containing phrases and sentences, which employ the basic material of the chart in various ways. After the correct sound has been obtained by intensive drill, and these sounds associated with the objects pictured on the reading-board, the teacher begins the important task of associating sound with symbol. At first the children hang letter-cards over the appropriate letters on the large chart, and later they match letters on their boards. The needs of

the class, of course, determine the variations in the exercises and the types of games next used. Gradually the children move onward to simple stories based upon the material with which they began. The ability of the class, naturally, determines the rate of progress, but I have heard quite ordinary children reading well at the end of their sixth month in school.

Probably you are asking, by this time, "Haven't you forgotten the readiness program?" There is no readiness program, except that incidentally provided in the kindergarten. In the Netherlands the child is ready when his mother first brings him to school, sometimes at the age of five. Everybody—including the teacher and the child himself—expects him to learn, and he must accept the responsibility. Then you may ask, "Are there no reading groups?" No, "Helen's friends" (euphemism for the brightest children) are not inspecting a toy under the pretense of reading while "Jack's friends" (the dullest children) are talking in disorder under the pretense of studying. But the teacher does take proper notice of individual differences, even though the attentive class might disappoint the American teacher's penchant for motion. Perhaps you also want to ask, "Is there, then, no integration?" No—if you are using educational jargon; yes—if you know that the Dutch teacher possesses a far greater store of exact knowledge than her trans-Atlantic counterpart, and that she is able to compare and relate and to synthesize quite readily. And now you must be concluding, "That repressive system is hopelessly old-fashioned."

Indeed, if the criterion is the current

practice in the United States, the Dutch procedure is out-of-date. And yet, pupils in continuation schools (boys and girls from twelve to fifteen who do not expect to specialize) show a gratifying knowledge of grammar—and of language, generally—when they study three foreign languages. They become competent newspaper readers, too; and the journalists know that they cannot resort to sensationalism when writing for such a body of readers. Likewise, they become discriminating radio-listeners; and although the state-controlled broadcasts never pander to ignorance, they still never need apologize for appealing to intelligence, because this great middle class of the nation is sober and critical. Above all, it possesses (as the higher classes) the tool of language for acquiring ideas and for analyzing them.

The contrasts between Europe and North America are so striking that one at first doubts the practicability of mutual borrowing. One cannot forget, though, that the two are inseparably linked by history and, consequently, by cultural ties; that the United States represents a special form of Western civilization. The links, therefore, must be stronger than the spaces which seem to separate; the similarities must be more significant than the differences. Also, when one considers the Netherlands, he must take care to avoid association of importance with size, for Americans often are not prepared to attribute power to things which are small. A Californian might scorn the lessons which the Dutchman could teach him.

It is true that the most acute problem in American education is that of welding the heterogeneous citizens into a single

people—a problem which no European nation need rank first. It is true, too, that the bewildering variations of family life in this country have placed exceptional demands upon the schools. Above all, the American citizen's notion of his rights (which usually are privileges in older nations) has divested the schools of much authority and subdued them to his ambitions. These conditions (which probably will persist until our resources have been exhausted and an era of scarcity ensues) make impossible the importation of such a sensible procedure as the Dutch language system—so no one need feel anxiety about such an eventuality.

Even though our teachers lack the authority and respect which a European teacher enjoys, the conscientious and clever ones still could imitate, with impunity, at least two of the Dutch teacher's characteristics: solid knowledge of language and thoroughness in teaching it. Both are unpopular today in this country, and they are not cultivated by teacher-training institutions, for very complex reasons. College curriculum committees advise against advance study (opprobriously labeling it

"mere subject matter"), dreading "overspecialization" which future teachers will not use directly in their own work. As a result, the minimum requirement for elementary teachers is extremely low, and the certifying agencies sympathetically accept a comparative ignorance of linguistics as satisfactory. Since small intellectual demands are made of the prospective teacher, he likewise acquires no habit of learning well and retaining what he has learned. In consequence of this combined weakness in preparation for language teaching, one dares expect only a few candidates to grasp the importance of a firm knowledge and to acquire it independently.

If, here and there, isolated teachers instill a genuine facility with language, this country, within a generation, at least should reduce the number of college graduates who receive treatment in reading clinics. Such latter-day pioneers would face strong resistance; and although they could not hope to equal the Dutch (much less, overtake them), they could help remove the curse of superficiality which plagues the American abroad.

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## *What is Teaching?*

NATHAN A. MILLER<sup>1</sup>

TEACHING? . . . many things to many people but to me creative teaching is—

Working with someone and not working someone, loving, understanding, beginning with the pupil where he is and taking him where he should be, but keeping in mind the goals of the learner and remembering that the goals must be meaningful to the learner.

Living for teacher, and for pupil, and not running-in-neutral living, active and not passive, direct as well as indirect sometimes.

Making deposits in the mill of learning from all activities and experiences of the learner and excluding no grain of experience as being too insignificant, or too bad, or too good for the mill.

Example more than precept, willingness to plan for, and with, and giving, concern for first things first: the PUPIL, and then arranging activities and experiences for bringing about desirable changes in this prime concern of the teacher, namely the PUPIL—and this is concerned with the whole of the personality—and then bringing discordant parts into harmony with the pattern of the whole personality.

Leadership and partnership and sharing and not dictatorship but a little democracy in action.

Acceptance of the pupil whether he is dirty or clean, foul speaking or pure speaking, high I.Q. or low I.Q., hungry or well fed, sinner or sinned against.

Positive in spirit and not negative, reasonable when the pupil is unreasonable, looking for real causes and needs and not fooled by mumbo-jumbo words to cover up a teacher's guilty feeling of failure such as the pupil "won't try," "doesn't want to learn," "is lazy," "doesn't care," but giving success and praise to the pupil.

Respecting pupils as persons with psychological and personal rights just as important to them as "teacher-rights" to the teacher, making mistakes but not making the same mistakes over and over.

Willingness for the teacher to be a real person and not a desire for the teacher to be a little tin god who does no wrong, says no wrong, and puts up with no wrong in anybody else, an impossible task, but teachers are impossible people (ask any pupil); therefore, it is being done everyday.

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# First Grade Phonics in Texas Schools

THELMA SHAW AKINS<sup>1</sup>

The schools of Texas use five series of textbooks for the teaching of reading in first grade. Each school chooses one of the five for a basic text. The authors of the manuals of these books are Emmett A. Betts, William S. Gray, Paul McKee, and David H. Russell. They, like most of the writers of the last two decades upon the technique of teaching reading, agree upon a few rather clearcut principles for phonics in first grade. These are some of the points of agreement:

1. In the first grade the initial study of sounds is confined to those that the child recognizes around him rather than to a study of the sounds represented by letters as symbols..
2. No study of the sounds of letters, as such, is made during the first few months of the child's school life.
3. Thought units, words and phrases, are the child's introduction to reading.
4. Reading is taught and practiced as a process of thought getting, using a stockpile of sight words, until the concept of reading as a gaining of ideas is established. Sight words are words that are recognized at sight and have been taught by association with telling, action, and pictures.
5. No device for giving independence in identifying new words is taught until the child has skill in getting ideas from these sight words.
6. Phonics is only one of many devices taught to give independence in recalling words once seen or in identifying strange

words. Pictures, context, structural analysis, recognition of a familiar part of a word, configuration, similarity to known words, all play a part in word identification along with phonetic devices.

A recent survey was made in the San Angelo, Texas, public school system, concerning the use of phonetic practices in first grades.<sup>2</sup> A personal interview with each of the thirty-six teachers of first grades in the school system was used to determine the actual practices in phonetic teaching in use during the school year 1951-1952.

The findings of the survey were compared with the recommendations of the manuals of the adopted texts. All of the teachers were using as basal texts *The Curriculum Foundation Series* by William S. Gray and others.

The study of the survey reveals that the San Angelo first grade teachers presented more phonics than the manuals of the adopted texts recommend in the nine principal phonetic practices suggested by the manuals for first grade work: (1) rhymes, (2) the sound of initial consonants, (3) the sound of final consonants, (4) introducing new words by the substitution of one initial consonant sound for another, (5) consonant digraph sounds,

<sup>1</sup>San Angelo, Texas.

<sup>2</sup>This survey was made by the author to use as a part of a thesis, *Phonics: A Survey of Actual Practices in Thirty-Six First Grades*, which was presented to the University of Texas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

(6) the addition of *s* to root words, (7) the addition of *ed* to root words, (8) the addition of *ing* to root words, and (9) compound words.

Going beyond the recommendations of the manuals in phonetic teaching, some teachers presented sounds of (1) vowels, (2) consonant blends, (3) consonant-vowel blends, (4) vowel consonant blends, (5) silent letters, and (6) some rules about phonics.

San Angelo teachers presented phonics more days than the manuals suggest, and they began some phonetic practices earlier in the school year than provided for by the manuals. The latter included teaching (1) the sound and appearance of letters in initial position in words, (2) the final consonant sounds of words, the addition of (3) *ed* and (4) *ing* to root words, and (5) compound words.

They taught (1) rhymes, (2) consonant digraph sounds, (3) new words by the substitution of one initial consonant sound for another, and (4) the addition of *s* to root words at the same time that the manuals recommend.

The over-all view shows that San Angelo's first grade children of 1951-1952 were taught more phonics than the manuals of the adopted texts recommend, and many phonetic practices earlier in the

school year than recommended by the manuals.

The study also reveals that San Angelo children began receiving phonetic training as early as they could be expected to profit from it, judged by research upon the subject. The burden of the phonetic teaching came in the latter half of the first grade year, which has been shown by Sexton and Herron to be the only period in which phonetic teaching functions in first grade.<sup>3</sup> At this same period about half of the children can be expected to have reached a mental age of seven years, which Dolch and Bloomster have found to be the lowest mental age at which a child can be expected to use phonics.<sup>4</sup>

Texas schools have adopted texts which give opportunity for phonetic teaching based upon sound principles, proved by research, endorsed by those in a position to know, *i. e.*, the leading educators in the field of beginning reading. Until more research proves better methods for the initial approach to reading, Texas first grade teachers cannot go far wrong in following the phonetic practices recommended by their basal texts.

<sup>3</sup>Sexton, Elmer R., and Herron, John S., "The Newark Phonics Experiment." *Elementary School Journal*. May, 1928, pp. 790-701.

<sup>4</sup>Dolch, E. W. and Bloomster, Maurine, "Phonic Readiness." *Elementary School Journal*. November, 1928, pp. 27-33. The second part of this article will appear in the fall.

# Phonic Study and Word Analysis - I

PAUL WITTY<sup>1</sup>

Examination of a textbook such as *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*, published in 1908, shows that phonetic instruction in American schools has long been a controversial issue.<sup>2</sup> In other countries, too, this issue has been debated for a very long time. For example, Sister Mary Christina Sullivan notes that "in varying degrees the teaching of phonics has been associated with the teaching of primary reading during a period which goes back at least three centuries."<sup>3</sup> The Port Royalists (1637-1661) adopted a system of phonics to replace the alphabet method of teaching reading.<sup>4</sup> In 1783, Noah Webster advocated a type of phonetic instruction by stressing the sounds as well as the names of the letters. From time to time, other phonetic approaches were recommended by American educators. In 1850, a special method, developed by E. Leigh, was introduced in the Boston Phonetic School.<sup>5</sup>

Other phonetic methods appeared at later times. One of the best known was the Pollard's Synthetic Method, which was employed rather widely during the last decade of the 19th century.<sup>6</sup>

Combinations of phonetic approaches were widely used throughout the first quarter of the 20th century when series of textbooks such as *The Gordon Readers*,<sup>7</sup> *The Beacon Readers*,<sup>8</sup> and *The Ward Readers*,<sup>9</sup> which included varied phonetic emphases, were introduced in American schools.

About 1925, a reaction transpired against phonetic systems and other extreme emphases in teaching children to read. The attention of educators was directed to other more appropriate methods of instruction. Word methods which had, of course, appeared earlier, were advocated by some educators; others stressed

the value of presenting larger units as the primary elements in perception. Some writers advocated an approach known as the analytic-synthetic method. According to one interpretation of this method, entire stories containing children's own accounts are first presented on experience charts. Words from these charts are selected for drills on flash-cards. After a basic stock of sight words is thus acquired, word analysis and phonetic study follow. There were, of course, variations in the way this method was employed. In the earlier interpretations, the story was prescribed and not the result of children's experience. But, in all approaches, the story was first presented; then it was analyzed

<sup>1</sup>Northwestern University. Appreciation is expressed to Ann Coomer for assistance in the preparation of this report. The second part of this report will appear in the fall.

<sup>2</sup>Edmund B. Huey. *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908, 1916.

<sup>3</sup>Sister Mary Christina Sullivan. "A Phonetic Analysis of the New Gates' Primary Reading Vocabulary." *The Catholic University of America Educational Research Monographs*, Vol. XL (September 15, 1938). Washington, D. C.: The Catholic Education Press, 1938.

<sup>4</sup>P. J. McCormick. *History of Education*. Washington, D. C.: Catholic Education Press, 1915, p. 299.

<sup>5</sup>E. Leigh. *Pronouncing Orthography*. St. Louis, 1864, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup>Rebecca Pollard. *Pollard's Synthetic Method. A Complete Manual*. Chicago: Western Publishing Company, 1896.

<sup>7</sup>Emma K. Gordon. *A Manual for Teachers of Primary Reading*. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1918.

<sup>8</sup>James H. Fassett. *The Beacon Primer*. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1912.

<sup>9</sup>Edward G. Ward. *The Ward Rational Method of Reading*. New York: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1894, 1896, 1907, 1919.

into its parts; and finally the parts were reassembled to make the story again.

Despite newer emphases, some educators continued to stress phonetic methods as the first step in teaching reading. In fact, several specific systems are now being employed in our schools. Reactions against separate systems and undue emphasis on pronunciation or on word analysis have been very strong. For example, in Chicago, this antagonism led to the formation of a non-oral approach to beginning reading instruction. Of course, every system has had its enthusiastic advocates.

In England, too, criticism of phonetic methods has been expressed again and again as the following statement shows:

The problem of phonics in the early stages of reading is one of the storm centres in the controversies of contemporary educational methods. Before discussing this subject it is perhaps necessary to say that the use of phonics in the teaching of reading is not so well entrenched in America as in Scotland, where, even today, there are few teachers who would embark on the teaching of reading without some recourse to this method. . . . One further general observation should be made; it should not be considered that the rival claims of phonic and nonphonic methods must be settled in favour of one of the claimants. In clinical practice both here and in the United States it has been found that among children who have failed to master the early stages of reading some make progress by appeal to the visual qualities of words, others learn rapidly under a regimen of phonics, while others profit most from a method, such as that described as the Fernald-Keller technique, which relies for word mastery on tracing and writing.<sup>10</sup>

It is true that success has been obtained with different methods of reading instruction including various phonetic approaches. However, it is desirable for teachers to use the most defensible and efficient approach. Perhaps, experimental data will enable us to arrive at a tentative decision concerning this issue. Let us

examine the results of experiments as they relate to the value of phonetic methods.

#### *Experiments Designed to Reveal the Value of Phonics*

In 1938, A. I. Gates and D. H. Russell reported a study of the relative effectiveness of different methods of instruction. One group of children was trained by an "intrinsic" method—a method which stresses words as units of perception. This training was given by the use of various exercises such as the selection of correct words from groups similar in form or in pronunciation. Instead of instruction through such exercises, a second group of children was given drills in phonics. It was found that the first group made the greater gains in reading skills. Gates and Russell concluded that excessive amounts of phonics should be avoided.<sup>11</sup> Other authorities, too, share this position and assert that over-emphasis on phonics may not only block the acquisition of reading skills but also may lead to lack of interest in reading.

A somewhat different conclusion was reached by Donald C. Agnew who also made a comprehensive study of phonics. After testing two groups of third grade children who had received different amounts of training, he concluded that the following positive advantages accrued from the teaching of phonics:

- (a) increased independence in recognizing words previously learned
- (b) greater ability to 'unlock' new words
- (c) better pronunciation, and
- (d) improved oral reading

This writer asserted that there was no sacrifice of interest in reading among pupils who

<sup>10</sup>W. B. Inglis. "The Early Stages of Reading: A Review of Recent Investigations." *Studies in Reading*. Vol. I. Scottish Council for Research in Reading. London: University of London Press, Ltd., 1948, pp. 65-66.

<sup>11</sup>A. I. Gates and D. H. Russell. "Types of Material, Vocabulary Burden, Word Analysis and Other Factors in Beginning Reading." *Elementary School Journal*, Vol. XXIX (September-October, 1938), pp. 27-36 and pp. 119-129.

had received large amounts of phonic training; he also found that the training did not result in a tendency to "neglect" context clues.<sup>12</sup>

Recent studies suggest that moderate amounts of training in phonics may prove helpful for pupils in the upper grades. J. Tiffin and M. McKinnis studied 155 pupils in grades five through eight. These children were given two silent reading tests and a third test requiring pronunciation of nonsense units. This third test was in large measure a test of ability to apply phonics. The scores on the pronunciation test correlated positively (+.40 to +.52) with the results of the tests of silent reading.<sup>13</sup>

Several other workers have concluded that training in phonics is helpful in remedial work. Even at the college level, phonic training has been successfully employed.<sup>14</sup> Yet the question of the amount and nature of phonic instruction to be employed in a developmental reading program is still unanswered by research.

Another aspect of research on phonics has yielded more reliable results. E. W. Dolch and M. Bloomster studied the relationship of phonic ability to mental maturity. It was noteworthy that children of mental ages lower than seven years were not successful on the phonics test used in this study. These writers conclude that a higher degree of mental maturity is required to apply phonics principles than is required to learn sight words.<sup>15</sup>

A. J. Harris, too, points out that "many of the difficulties which led to the reaction against phonics were the result not of phonics instruction as such, but of introducing phonic training at too early a stage in the average child's development. By placing phonics somewhat higher up in the curriculum, many of the possible dangers can be avoided."<sup>16</sup>

Recently, other writers have considered "readiness" for phonics and have sought criteria to insure the child's ability to profit from phonetic training when it is introduced. Al-

though research data are meager on this topic, it is rather generally agreed that certain developments and acquisitions are necessary before phonetic training should be undertaken. According to Harris, the child who is ready for such instruction will demonstrate these attainments:

- (1) He will be able to detect the difference between words that sound alike, such as *man* and *men*, or *bad* and *bat*.
- (2) He will be able to detect whether two words begin with same sound.
- (3) He will be sensitive to rhymes; he will be able to pick out words that rhyme and will be able to supply words that rhyme with a given word.
- (4) He will be able to detect similarities and differences in word endings and middle vowels of words.
- (5) He will be able to blend the sounds of parts of a word and to recognize the word when it is presented to him sound by sound...

Some of these acquisitions, Harris believes, can be cultivated during the pre-school period; for example, "speaking distinctly and correctly, listening to and reciting rhymes and poetry." However, other acquisitions might well be de-

<sup>12</sup>Donald C. Agnew. "The Effect of Varied Amounts of Phonetic training on Primary Reading." *Duke University Research Studies in Education*, No. 5. Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1939, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup>J. Tiffin and M. McKinnis. "Phonetic Ability: Its Measurement and Relation to Reading Ability." *School and Society*, Vol. LI (1940), pp. 190-192.

<sup>14</sup>M. V. Rogers. "Phonic Ability as Related to Certain Aspects of Reading at the College Level." *Journal of Experimental Education*, Vol. VI (1938), pp. 381-395.

<sup>15</sup>E. W. Dolch and M. Bloomster. "Phonic Readiness." *Elementary School Journal*, Vol. XXXVIII (1937), pp. 201, 205.

<sup>16</sup>A. J. Harris. *How to Increase Reading Ability*. New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1947, p. 294.

laid until children have acquired a basic stock of sight words.<sup>17</sup>

Although several investigations disclose the need for phonic readiness, few research studies have been made to disclose the optimum time to introduce the various phonic elements. Several writers have made suggestions based on observation of practice; for example:

The building of word families is a popular activity in the first and second grades. The teacher usually waits until the children have learned two or three words that rhyme. She prints them in column form, calls attention to their similarity in sound and appearance, and underlines the common element in each word. Children are encouraged to suggest other words which are added to the family.<sup>18</sup>

This practice, Harris points out, has limited value when words of more than one syllable are studied since the phonograms around which one-syllable words are built are not frequently found in longer words.

E. W. Dolch assembled 14,000 words from children's textbooks. He also studied the 19,000 words in *A Combined Word List*.<sup>19</sup> More than 16,000 of the latter list were polysyllables. And more than 1000 different syllables were noted in the list of 14,000 words. The phonics commonly presented in the first two grades accounted for less than twelve per cent of the 1000 syllables. Most of these syllables began with consonants and were not to be mastered by applying principles stressed in the earlier work with monosyllables. Dolch indicates that every phonogram in a group compiled from the Gates' and the Washburne-Vogel lists begins with a vowel. Accordingly, he stresses the need for "letter phonics" beyond the primary grades, including emphases on syllables beginning with consonants.<sup>20</sup>

Miles Tinker, after considering research studies, expressed a sensible warning regarding isolation of phonetic activities:

... the indications are that the teaching

of phonetics should begin only when the child has phonetic readiness. This stage is apparently reached when the child has acquired the visual and auditory discrimination adequate for differentiation between letter sounds, when the child has acquired a considerable stock of sight words, when he has attained a mental age of approximately seven years, and when he is making some progress in formal reading situations. Formal training in phonetics, therefore, should be started only after the child has progressed well along in first grade work. Nevertheless, some informal training such as with initial sounds, may profitably be given soon after the beginning of formal reading. Such training should always be intrinsic to the reading situation. Teaching phonetics by elaborate isolated word drills cannot be justified. Analysis of an isolated word should always be followed by its use in the context of actual reading. In other terms, word analysis activities should not be permitted to become isolated activities.<sup>21</sup>

Despite experimental evidence and recommendations of experts, extreme emphasis on phonics, often as an isolated activity, continues to be found in many schools. In 1941, W. A. Brownell reported the results of the use of phonics by 627 primary grade teachers in twenty-six different school systems. Brownell drew these conclusions:

- (1) The trend is to give more emphasis to phonics in grades two and three than in grade one.
- (2) There are great differences in the amount of phonics taught in different school systems as well as

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 294-295.

<sup>18</sup> A. J. Harris. *op. cit.*, p. 298.

<sup>19</sup> B. R. Buckingham and E. W. Dolch. *A Combined Word List*. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1936.

<sup>20</sup> E. W. Dolch. "Phonics and Polysyllables." *Elementary English Review*, Vol. XV (1938), pp. 120-124.

<sup>21</sup> Miles A. Tinker. *Teaching Elementary Reading*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1952, p. 140.

differences within classrooms of the same system.

(3) There is no relation between the teaching of phonics and the age of the teacher, years of experience, or length of time since the teacher's last course in reading methods.

(4) Rural teachers tend to emphasize phonics more than do city teachers.<sup>22</sup>

The recent publication of a number of systems of phonetics suggests a renewal of interest in this phase of reading instruction. Several of <sup>22</sup>W. A. Brownell. "Current Practices with Respect to Phonetic Analysis in the Primary Grades." *Elementary School Journal*, Vol. XLII (1941), pp. 195-206.

these systems are designed to present phonetic instruction as a more or less isolated activity.

#### *When Shall Various Phonic Elements Be Introduced?*

There are many plans suggested for the introduction of phonic elements. The following suggestions made by Harris are illustrative of these efforts.<sup>23</sup> In this presentation, goals are conveniently grouped under three headings according to reading levels extending from the pre-primer to the third reader.

<sup>23</sup>A. J. Harris. *op. cit.*, pp. 302-304. See also, Nila B. Smith. "Shall We Teach Phonics?" *Elementary English Review*, Vol. XX (1943), pp. 60-68.

#### A Planned Sequence of Word Recognition Goals (From Harris)

Reader Level	Sight Recognition	Visual and Auditory Readiness	Word Analysis and Phonics
Pre-Primer	50-75 words	<p>Matches, objects, pictures, letters, words, phrases, sentences.</p> <p>Notes similarity in the sounds of rhyming words.</p>	<p>Recognizes same word beginning with capital or lower-case letter</p> <p>Recognizes plural made by adding s.</p>
Primer	125-200 new words	<p>Participates in composing simple rhymes.</p> <p>Supplies missing word in an incomplete rhyme.</p> <p>Notes sound of words that begin alike.</p>	<p>Uses context clues and picture clues in recognizing words.</p> <p>Recognizes known parts in compound words (into, something).</p> <p>Recognizes and constructs variants ending in s, es, d, ed, ing.</p>
First Reader	150-300 words	<p>Continued use of rhymes.</p> <p>Listens to similarities and differences in beginnings and ending of words.</p>	<p>Continued use of context, picture clues, words within words, and endings.</p> <p>Learns names of all letters of alphabet.</p> <p>Use of initial consonant sounds, including consonant digraphs ch, sh, th, wh (omitting v, x, z).</p>

Second Reader	400-750 new words	<p>Listens to and compares words with different vowel sounds: bill-bell, man-men, can-cane.</p> <p>Listens to and compares words starting with single and double consonants: fight-fright, seal-steal, sake-snake, etc.</p>	<p>Recognizes and uses sounds of initial and final consonants, combining with context clues.</p> <p>Builds new words by changing the consonants in known words.</p> <p>Learns the more common two-letter consonant blends: tr, fl, st, sl, fr, etc.</p> <p>Learns the short and long sounds of the vowels: a, e, i, o, u, y.</p> <p>Learns the rule of final silent e.</p> <p>Learns the common vowel digraphs, ai, ay, ea, oa, ee, oo.</p>
Third Reader	600-1000 new words	<p>Listens to pronunciation of words containing new phonic elements.</p>	<p>Learns less common two-consonant blends such as pl, cr, qu, gn, kn, etc., and some three consonant blends: str, spr, tch, sch.</p> <p>Learns vowel diphthongs such as oi, oy, ow, ei, ou.</p> <p>Learns sounds of vowels when followed by l, r, or w.</p> <p>Learns endings, ion and tion.</p> <p>Recognizes stems in words ending in y, ly, er, est, ful, able, etc.</p> <p>Builds new words by adding suffixes.</p> <p>Recognizes contractions such as don't, haven't, couldn't, etc.</p> <p>Learns to divide two-syllable and three-syllable words into syllables.</p>

William S. Gray, also, sets forth the following levels instead of grade standards for phonic training:

At Level One, in general, the child applies his knowledge of single consonants in attacking new words and he applies his knowledge of simple inflectional endings, -s, -'s, -ed, -ing. At this level he should be able to attack a word form which is like a known word except for a single initial or final consonant letter or a known structural element.

At Level Two, he applies his knowledge of two-letter consonant symbols, that is, of consonant blends and the special symbols *wh*, *th*, *ch*, *sh*, and *ng*. He also identifies root words in inflected forms in which the final consonant is doubled before the ending.

At Level Three, he applies his knowledge of vowel elements to attack any one syllable word in which the vowel sound may be determined by associating the appropriate sound (or sounds) with the symbols *ow*, *ou*, *oi*, *oy*, or *oo*, or by applying general principles that aid in determining vowel sounds. He is able to attack an inflected form in a known root in which the final *y* is changed to *i*, or the final *e* is dropped before the ending.

At Level Four the child applies both structural and phonetic analysis to words of more than one syllable. In doing so, he applies his knowledge of general principles of syllabication and of principles that aid in determining vowel sounds, as well as his knowledge of accent. He also readily identifies such simple prefixes and suffixes as *re*-, *dis*-, *im*-, *-ful*, *-ish*, *-ness*, *-ly*, *-y*, and

attacks words formed by adding these (or inflectional endings) to unknown root words of one or two syllables.

At the first four application levels the child uses structural and phonetic analysis to derive the sound of a printed word. These methods of attack are effective only if the spoken counterpart and meaning of the new printed word are familiar to him.

At Level Five for the first time he attacks words which are unfamiliar to him in sound or in meaning as well as in form. At this last level he uses the dictionary to derive both the sounds and the meaning of words.<sup>24</sup>

Donald D. Durrell after noting the different emphases in teaching reading over the previous ten years, offered the following suggestions:

A complete program would include ear training to give the child skill in attending to the auditory elements of words, visual training for recognition of the visual elements that accompany word sounds and above all, provision for independent use of the skills. . . . One of the greatest weaknesses in the old family system of phonics was that while the child was able to sound each word element he was unable to apply his skill successfully in solving new words he encountered. After any exercise designed to teach the child the recognition of word elements, lessons should be provided for applying the skill in the independent solution of new words. . . .

For practice in word analysis no word should be included unless it is already in

the child's hearing and speaking vocabulary. . . .

It is desirable to delay instruction in word analysis until the child has acquired a sight vocabulary of seventy-five to one hundred words. . . .

However, there are several background skills of value to the child in word recognition which may be taught even before the child enters school. These include the names of letters, ear-training exercises, and some simple writing.<sup>25</sup>

There is a wide variation too in phonic practices recommended in different courses of study and followed in different localities. One may note these variations in the suggested programs of phonic instruction for schools in Chicago and in Minneapolis. Following are the programs advocated for the kindergarten and grades one to three in Chicago and for two of the four periods of phonic instruction in Minneapolis. In the suggested program for the language arts in Chicago, one area is designated as "Word Study, Phonics and Spelling." For the kindergarten only "auditory discrimination" and "training in sound by use of pictures of familiar objects" are listed.

<sup>24</sup>William S. Gray. *On Their Own in Reading*. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1948, pp. 124-125.

<sup>25</sup>Donald D. Durrell. *Improvement of Basic Reading Abilities*. Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Company, 1940, pp. 198-200.

#### Areas of Learning (Chicago Public Schools)<sup>26</sup>

##### For Grade One

###### Ear Training

1. Rhymes for ear training
2. Words that rhyme
3. Words beginning with the same letter
4. Introduction of individual consonant sounds

###### Visual Training

1. On board, teacher writes words beginning with s, f, b, p, etc.
2. Digraphs: sh, ch.

###### Basic list of spelling words

<sup>26</sup>Areas of Learning (Mimeographed Form) Chicago Public Schools. Board of Education. City of Chicago, 1950.

*For Grade Two*

## Ear Training

1. Rhymes from books
2. Pupils' rhymes of words
3. Pupils' listening for beginning and ending sounds

## Visual Training

1. Review of initial consonants.
2. Presentation of initial consonant blends and digraphs: *fr-gr-st-tr-br-ch-sh.*
3. Syllabication: prefixes and suffixes.
4. Structural analysis. Word endings: *-ing, -y, -ly, -er, -est.*
5. Developmental skill in blending.
6. Long and short vowels: *a, e, i, o, u.*

## Basic list of spelling words

*For Grade Three*

## Ear Training

1. Review of consonants, blends and digraphs.
2. Presentation of vowel combinations.

## Visual Training

1. Practice is seeing and recognizing consonants, blends, digraphs and vowels.
2. Initial consonants, *y*, and blends *tw, qu.*
3. Teaching of hard and soft *g.*
4. Review of long and short vowels.
5. Review of final *e* in one syllable words.
6. Silent letters—*wr, kn.*
7. Vowels modified by *r.*
8. Vowel digraphs and diphthongs.
9. Three-letter blends: *spr, str, scr, squ.*
10. Structural analysis.

## Basic list of spelling words

In Minneapolis, the *Guide to Teaching Reading in the Elementary (public) School* outlines objectives in word analysis and phonics for "periods" in a "Developmental Reading Program."<sup>27</sup>

- I The Pre-Reading Period. "This occupies the school years of the kindergarten and first grade for all children." Develop ability to notice likenesses and differences in word sounds and forms in pictures, games, such as Lotto; puzzles, rhyming words, letter and word sounds. Notice words or names printed on the board.
- II Period of Introducing Children to Reading. "This takes place during the first grade for most children. For some

children this period begins late in first grade or in second grade.

To develop accurate recognition and pronunciation

Note configuration of a word:

Look for striking characteristics

Look for tall letters

Look for two letters alike

Make use of word analysis

Give ear training to aid in recognition of similarity in initial and final sounds

To develop beginnings of word analysis

<sup>27</sup>*Guide to Teaching Reading in the Elementary School.* Minneapolis Public Schools, Division of Elementary Education, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1950.

Give practice in recognizing and using the following consonants when occurring initially in words: h, b, p, s, m, d, t, w, g, c, j, f

Identify the similarity in sound and appearance of sight words which are alike except for initial consonants

Recognize "small words" in longer ones

Recognize words formed by adding "s" to sight words

Later word analysis:

Recognize a new word which is like a known word except for initial sound

Give practice in recognizing and using the following double consonants when occurring initially in words met in reading situations: th, wh, sh, ch.

Recognize the sound and appearance of the following consonants when occurring in final position in words met in reading situations: l, t, m, n, d, s.

Recognize the sound and appearance of word variants met in reading situations: er, ed, ing, est.

Apply the recognition of "small words" in longer ones in attacking unfamiliar sounds.

Recognize vowel sounds met in reading situations.

III Period of Growth in Independence in Reading. "For the child of normal reading ability this period occupies grades 2 and 3. For some children in the later grades this may still be the level of reading development. There may be children in first grade whose reading ability has reached this higher level. Teachers of all grades will be concerned with the curriculum of this period. This period should develop without break or gap from the preceding period into the period which follows."

For Period III, similarly detailed suggestions are given to help the child develop independence in word recognition through structural analysis and through phonetic analysis.

Some limitations of phonetic approaches are recognized by supervisors and administrators who are working with children. This warning is found in a publication by the New Mexico State Department of Education, 1942:

There is no device nor supplementary practice which will give the training in word meaning and interpretation equal to that of experience with large quantities of reading materials...<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, phonics should not be introduced until children are ready.

Phonics should be introduced when needed. . . . The child should have a reading vocabulary of twenty-five to fifty sight words... phonic training should begin to note points of similarities and differences in the sight words which they know.<sup>29</sup>

In the Intermediate Manual for grades 4, 5, 6 of the Cincinnati Public Schools, 1951, this statement is found:

Versatility of attack should mark all efforts of pupils in unlocking the pronunciation and meaning of new words. In so far as possible help in word attack should be given as the need arises while the pupils read.<sup>30</sup>

This manual then suggests that the teachers' guides accompanying basal texts be followed "if persistent repetition is needed to attain certain (phonetic) techniques."

And these sensible suggestions are then made:

Context analysis is the best single way of identifying new words. Since phonetic skill is not an end in itself, pupils should not continue to analyze known words phonetically.<sup>31</sup>

In an Arizona state course of study the following statement appears:

<sup>28</sup>*Handbook of Essentials in Language Arts.* State Department of Public Instruction, New Mexico, 1942.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>*The Intermediate Manual. A Teacher's Guide.* Grades Four, Five and Six. Curriculum Bulletin, 125. Board of Education, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1945.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.* p. 51.

Phonics is only one tool to use in attacking strange words... other tools such as analogy are important and need to be taught. Phonics are merely a tool and not a method of teaching children to read.

Drill must not be emphasized to the point that the child fails to read for meaning.<sup>32</sup>

Curious drills are suggested in some manuals including these sentences to help pupils in "individual word attack training":

The dear little dog drove the deer

down the ditch to the door of the dug-out. The door of the dug-out was down in the dirt. The dear little dog could not drive the deer to the door of the dug-out.

The above drill is suggested in the New Mexico course of study which includes also this admonition:

...the primary objective is not to drill a small number of phonograms into pupils' heads, but to develop a general eye-ear sensitivity and a few general ways of reading printed words.

## *Current English Forum<sup>1</sup>*

### PARTS OF SPEECH

F. E. S. asks: "I was taught that the parts of speech are basic concepts in English grammar. But my students are confused by the fact that the same word or phrase is one part of speech in one sentence and a different part of speech in another. Is there some way of explaining why this is so, which can resolve the apparent contradiction in students' minds?"

The traditional classification of the eight parts of speech which we have all learned was based originally on the assumption that English, like Latin or Greek, is an inflected language. In Latin the important parts of speech (nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and verbs) have sets of distinct inflections or word-forms expressed in the declensional endings of nouns, pronouns, and adjectives and in the conjugational endings of verbs. By Chaucer's time English had dropped the great bulk of the inflected forms which it had had in the Old English period. Since 1400 or 1500 English has had only a very few of the inflected forms it once possessed. In Latin or Greek, as in some highly inflected contemporary languages like German, the important parts of speech were determined chiefly by their characteristic inflected forms. The result of this major change in the structure of the English language, from a highly inflected one

to one with relatively few inflections, has been that we have lost the relatively consistent basis for classifying the parts of speech, which a highly inflected language has.

We shift from lexical or dictionary meaning, to function in the sentence, to word-form in classifying words as parts of speech in modern English.

In "The mail arrives at noon" we classify *mail* as a noun partly because of its lexical meaning and partly because of its function in the sentence as subject. In "John works in the mail room" we classify *mail* as an adjective on the basis of its function in the sentence as a modifier of *room*. In "He mailed the letter" we classify *mailed* as a verb partly because of its function in the sentence in expressing action and partly because of its inflected form *-ed* showing past tense.

Some contemporary scholars in the linguistics field have rejected the old eight-fold parts of speech classification on the grounds that a classification lacking a consistent principle is unscientific, and have offered classifications which seek to have a consistent basis.

<sup>1</sup>This section is sponsored by the Council's Committee on Current English Usage, Dr. Margaret M. Bryant, Chairman.

Professor L. M. Myers<sup>2</sup> would have us ignore function in the sentence or lexical meaning as bases for classifying the parts of speech in English, and rely solely on word-forms. He argues that only five of the parts of speech, as commonly recognized, undergo changes of form. Nouns have inflected forms to show plurality and genitive relations (boys, boy's, boys'). Pronouns, of course, have multiple forms, e. g., *he, him, his; they, them, their, theirs*. Verbs have their distinct forms for tense and number (*walk, walks, walked; see, sees, saw, seen, etc.*) Adjectives in many cases undergo inflection to show comparative or superlative degree (*greater, greatest, etc.*) And adverbs, Myers argues, have a distinctive *ly* inflection (*loudly, proudly, etc.*) Since none of the remaining parts of speech show any changes of form, he would group them under the single heading of connectives and miscellaneous invariables. In his words: "The group includes all the words usually classed as interjections, prepositions, and conjunctions, those 'adverbs' which do not have an *-ly* ending, and a few words that originally belonged to other parts of speech, but which have now lost their inflection."<sup>3</sup> Thus Myers offers a six category classification. Word-form or inflection, or the lack of it, is his basis of classification.

In the view of the present writer, Professor Myers' system seems to ignore the facts that in modern English the inflections are very few and that word-order, or the position of words relative to one another in the sentence, is the more prominent device for showing grammatical functions. This system commits one to saying that in such a sentence as "She sings clearly," *clearly* is an adverb because of its *-ly* inflection, but that in "She sings well," *well* is not an adverb, but a "miscellaneous invariable." What would seem important about these words

<sup>2</sup>L. M. Myers, *American English* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952), Chap. IV.

<sup>3</sup>Myers, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

is what functions they are performing in the sentence; both are qualifying the meaning expressed by the verb, *sing*.

Professor Charles C. Fries<sup>4</sup> offers a four-category classification of the parts of speech in modern English, based partly on the few inflections left and partly on the word-order positions which words occupy as "signals of structural meaning" in sentences. Like Professor Myers, Fries rejects the lexical or dictionary meanings of words as a sound basis of classification. While Professor Fries's system cannot be explained in detail here, it discards completely the conventional terms (noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, interjection) and classifies words as belonging to "Class I," "Class II," "Class III," and "Class IV." One illustration may give the basic idea of this system. In "Uggles wogged diggs" (a "nonsense" sentence Fries uses for illustration), *uggles* and *diggs* are classified as "Class I" words partly on the basis of their word-order positions relative to *wogged*, a "Class II" word, and partly on the basis of their *s* inflections for plurality. While Fries's Class I, Class II, and Class III words look very much like "nouns," "verbs," and "adjectives," respectively, he wishes to abandon these terms because the verbal definitions so widely understood for them point to lexical meanings, which he wishes to reject as a basis of classification. His Class IV words include what would be widely interpreted as adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections.

It is the present writer's view that, interesting as these attempts to reclassify the parts of speech are, they overlook the fact that it is primarily function in the sentence which determines for the users of a language what "part of speech" a given word or word-group is serving

<sup>4</sup>Charles C. Fries, *The Structure of English* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952).

<sup>5</sup>Otto Jespersen, *Essentials of English Grammar* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1933), p. 71.

as. In certain instances the presence of inflected forms may play their role, but in a language depending chiefly on word-order, as modern English does, it is chiefly function in the sentence which makes classification possible. The total meaning of a word in an English sentence includes its lexical or commonly agreed upon meaning, its private meaning to any given individual stemming from his personal experience, and its function in the sentence. The function of a word in a sentence may be indicated by its word-order position, by an inflection if one is present, or by a combination of the two. The present tendency among some linguists to analyze and classify the elements and relations of linguistic expressions solely on the basis of word-forms or of word-order positions, in abstraction from the lexical and functional meanings involved, seems to the present writer an oversimplification of the complex nature of language. Otto Jespersen<sup>5</sup> wrote: ". . . in order to find out what class a word belongs to it is not enough to consider its form in itself; what is decisive is the way in which the word in connected speech 'behaves' towards other words, and in which other words behave towards it. If we find that one and the same form is used now as a substantive, now as an adjective or verb, this does not mean that the distinction between word-classes is obliterated in English, for in each particular combination the form concerned belongs decidedly to one class only; but the form should not be looked at in isolation."

There are five major functions of words and word-groups in sentences. These are as substantives, verbs, adjective modifiers, adverb

modifiers, and connectives. If both lexical meaning and function are considered in many instances, a given word appears to be performing two of these functions at one and the same time. In "He sat in the chimney corner," the word, *chimney*, is functioning both as a "thing word," or substantive, and as an adjective modifier of the noun, *corner*. Hence some grammarians have called "chimney" a "noun adjunct." It would seem simpler for purposes of classification to consider only its grammatical function as an adjective. Using grammatical function in the sentence as the basis of classification enables us to decide what part of speech a single word is serving as.

When we pass from single words to phrases and subordinate clauses, however, even this basis of classification encounters difficulties. In such a sentence as "His advice was what we needed," should we consider the subordinate clause, *what we needed*, as a "noun" clause identifying *advice*, that is, an appositive in the predicate, or as an "adjective" clause modifying *advice*? The present writer feels that either answer is arbitrary, and that it is better simply to say that *what we needed* is a clause subjective complement.

Certainly in the upper years of elementary school it is sufficient if we get the students to be able to recognize the five main functions that single words and relatively simple phrases most commonly express—substantives, verbs, adjective modifiers, adverb modifiers, and connectives (preposition and conjunction).

Edward L. Anderson  
Brooklyn College

## Look and Listen

Edited by RAOUL R. HAAS<sup>1</sup>

Featured reviews by ELLSWORTH FARIS, JR.<sup>2</sup>

*Filmstrips, first introduced about 1920, have increased steadily in popularity as an educational aid because of their flexibility. They are especially suited to prolonged projection, are relatively inexpensive and are simple to use.*

*The unique contribution of the filmstrip for classroom instruction, pointed out by Vernon G. Dameron, former director of audio-visual education of the NEA, is cited by Kinder:<sup>3</sup>*

The silent filmstrip is not a succession of disassociated slides; it should be thought of as an adaptation of the silent motion picture, because of its continuity in both pictorial and verbal presentation. Also, it is not just an illustrator of nouns. Silent filmstrips are effective in presenting many activities. In fact, this medium capitalizes upon the elimination of irrelevant—and often distracting—motion by showing only the pertinent characteristics of each detailed step in a procedure.

*"Look and Listen" is devoted this month to reviews of a group of silent filmstrips—some new, some old. The filmstrips with particular value in the social studies are reviewed by Dr. Faris; those in the language arts by the editor.*

### *Filmstrips for the Social Studies*

● *Conservation for Beginners* (6 filmstrips, color; each \$5.00; complete set \$28.50. Prepared by Mrs. H. C. Payne, U. S. Forest Service; illustrations by Farrell Collett. Society for Visual Education, Inc., 1345 Diversey Parkway, Chicago 14, Illinois.)

A series of filmstrips on the fundamentals of forest, soil, and wildlife conservation. Each strip, about twenty or thirty frames long, presents lessons in story form for children at the intermediate grade level. The art work, in color,

is generally good and sometimes outstanding; although the editorial content is uneven. Some strips treat only a few topics, while others contain a comparatively large mass of material. Each strip closes with one frame of review questions to emphasize the most important points. The series should be helpful in grades three or four, though some seven-year-old children will enjoy the showings.

1. *Sonny Squirrel and the Pine Trees.* (A430-1) Illustrates the natural process of reforestation as seeds of trees are scattered by animals. Also indicates the value of selective logging as a means of preserving and improving timber stands, showing the results of good and bad practice on two areas of woodland. While more limited in scope than some others, this is a useful strip when used as a part of the series.

2. *The Deer and the Haystack.* (A430-2) Bob learns that when too many deer occupy an area, their forage becomes scarce and they turn to eating hay which the farmers have stored for cattle feed. The control of this overpopulation is to encourage more deer hunting in the region, relieving the pressure on the food supply.

3. *A Picnic for Dick and His Friends.* (A430-3) A discussion and visual demonstration of the recreational value of wooded areas. While on a picnic with his family, Dick learns to appreciate the value of the forest preserve and receives brief lessons in "good manners" in the parks as they apply to the care of campsites,

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<sup>2</sup>Dr. Faris is Instructor in History, North Side Branch, Chicago Teachers College.

<sup>3</sup>Kinder, James S. *Audio-Visual Materials and Techniques.* N. Y.: American Book Co., 1950. P. 175.

avoidance of pollution of streams, fire precautions, and the like.

4. *The Lamb and the Bluebells.* (A430-4) Illustrates the results of overgrazing of stock pastures. When the sheep are taken to the mountain meadow in the spring they discover that all the delicious bluebells are gone; there is some grass, but grass is not as good for sheep. They do not fatten well nor does the grass produce as much wool as does richer pasture. This shortage of good pasture was caused by overgrazing during the previous year. It is indicated that overgrazing may result in soil erosion.

5. *Susan and the Forest Fire.* (A430-5) Susan goes for a drive in the woods with her family and they discover a forest fire. Father helps to fight the fire, while mother and the children go to a nearby house to call the forest ranger and his fire-fighting crew who arrive promptly with their equipment and set to work. Demonstrates the effect of a forest fire on wild life, the methods of fighting fires, the result of a fire in destruction of timber, and shows carelessness with matches to be a major cause of fire. Fire prevention measures are discussed, relating principally to the responsibility of the individual use of the woods. One of the best in the series.

6. *The Muddy Raindrops.* (A430-6) This strip discusses, from several viewpoints, the problems of soil erosion. A rainy day, seen from inside the house, provides the children with a lesson in the value of rainfall, the causes and effects of soil erosion, the pollution of water as one result of poor soil management. The important causes of erosion are shown as overgrazing by animals, over-cutting of forests and destruction of trees by fire. The barren ground produced in these ways results in severe gullying (very strikingly illustrated) and the pollution of stream with consequent harm to stream life and the loss of value of the water for human use. The individual frames provide many opportunities for fruitful class discussion. The

smiling (clear) and sad (muddy) water drops will leave a strong image in the pupils' minds, though some teachers will doubtless object to the personification of inorganic matter.

● *Then and Now in the United States.* (18 filmstrips, color, by Clarence W. Sorenson; art direction by Milo Winter. Prices on request to Silver Burdett Company, Audio Visual Division, 45 East 17th Street, New York 3, N. Y.)

This is a group of eighteen filmstrips, twelve of which, available presently, are rated superior. The United States is divided into eighteen regions, some of them physiographic (the Tennessee Valley), others economic or cultural (the Corn Belt, the cotton Belt), and each region is the subject of one strip. Each strip contains about forty frames in color and consists of maps, diagrams, pictures, and text. Each closes with a summary statement, "The Story in a Few Words." There is a teacher's manual for each strip which describes the series, suggests how the individual films may be used, and indicates the content of each frame. The back cover of the manual lists the titles in the series and provides maps showing the separate regions covered. The strips are intended to serve courses in American history and regional geography and some might also be used to provide background material for courses in American literature.

Each strip begins with one or two maps showing the extent and location of the region covered and describes briefly its main physical features. The original occupancy of the area by the Indians is then shown in word and picture, this being contrasted with the earliest white exploitation of the land. The story is continued into more recent times, in most cases showing the steady growth of settlement and indicating, where appropriate, the significance of individual technological devices. The effects of the industrial revolution are shown, as well as the results of the increase in number and density of population, the expansion of markets, and im-

provements in transportation and communication. The rising standard of living thus made possible is plainly and convincingly illustrated. Some contemporary problems are mentioned, such as the exhaustion and erosion of soils in the South, though one might wish for more careful attention to other modern issues. As treatments of economic geography, the strips are much better in agriculture and less effective in manufacturing and the urban economy.

The maps are clear, accurate, and attractive. The art work is good and the pictures are adapted from modern photographs and older prints and illustration. This practice combines, fortunately, historical accuracy with the brilliance and eye-appeal of up-to-date techniques of illustration. The teacher's manual gives the sources of the pictures, demonstrating the care, integrity, and professional competence of the editorial staff. The text frames are well-spaced in relation to the topics treated; and the concepts presented, while simple enough to be grasped by the intermediate grades, provide ample opportunity for discussion by junior high school students. The strips are useful not only as a direct teaching aid but also as a means of attacking the more naive forms of geographic determinism that crowd some textbooks; the modified land use which results from a changing economy and technology is made quite plain. The organization of the series into eighteen parts will commend itself to teachers planning to use it for either a semester or a full school year.

The unusual flexibility, accuracy, and attractiveness of these filmstrips make them one of the finest products of their type. Highly recommended for grades four to ten.

#### *Filmstrips for the Language Arts*

● *Reading Speed-i-o-Strip Series.* (16 filmstrips, color, b&w. Consultant, Louise Farwell Davis, Director of Guidance, National College Visual Education, Inc.)

The filmstrips in this series have been developed especially for tachistoscopic training, although they are useful without this camera-like device. A tachistoscope attachment, the Speed-i-o-Scope, which permits exposures of projected material from one 1/100 of a second to one second, is available through the society. It is the purpose of such training to develop or improve eye-hand-brain coordination, awareness of detail, perceptual span, visual memory, etc. The tachistoscope will not accomplish all of these with all pupils; nor will it take the place of other teaching techniques. It does offer, however, additional opportunity for learning and evaluation.

1. *Words.* (A110-1—6. 6 filmstrips, b&w, with manual \$12.00) These six strips consist of 50 to 60 frames, each containing one printed word from the basic sight vocabulary list compiled by Dolch. The words are arranged in order of the number of letters in the words with the purpose of assisting the child to gradually increase his eye span and to see more in one fixation.

2. *Familiar Objects — Line Drawings.* (A110-16—18. 3 filmstrips, b&w, with manual \$6.00) The familiar objects in the first two filmstrips—dog, cow, coat, shoe, etc.—are line drawings illustrating the commonest nouns from the Dolch list. One frame shows the object alone, the next the same object with its name. The films may be used for recognition alone or for practice in association of words with objects.

The frames in the third strip show more than one object, none of which are labelled. These drawings may be used not only for recognition, but for the development of quantity concepts in the arithmetic readiness program.

3. *Phonics: A Key to Better Reading.* (A115-1—6. 6 filmstrips, color, \$28.50; individually, \$5.00 per subject. Prepared by Devona M. Price and Hilda B. Pogue, Oak Park, Illinois, Public Schools.) This group of six film-

strips, presented in color, is intended to assist children as they develop independence in word recognition through phonetic attack. The brilliance and artistic merit of the color and art work should find students highly motivated and attentive. The game-like quality of many of the exercises will make the learning pleasurable and, when properly employed, permanent.

Special attention is paid in the exercises to hearing and saying sounds and words. The strips also help in providing spelling clues as, for example, plurals, possessives, and elisions.

Some of the titles, "Let's Start with Key Words," "Vowel Sounds Help You," and "Test Yourself on Sounds," are indicative of the content of this well-produced and helpful series.

## The Educational Scene

Edited by WILLIAM A. JENKINS<sup>1</sup>

### NCTE Election Notice

In accordance with the constitution of the National Council of Teachers of English, the Board of Directors at its meeting last Thanksgiving Day chose Paul Farmer, Helene W. Hartley, Helen K. Mackintosh, Mark Neville, and Dora V. Smith as a Nominating Committee to propose officers for 1954. Through Paul Farmer, the chairman, the committee offers these nominees:

*For President:* Lou LaBrant, New York University

*For First Vice-President:* John Gerber, State University of Iowa

*For Second Vice-President:* Joseph Mersand, Long Island City High School, New York City

*For Directors-at-Large:* William D. Boutwell, *Scholastic Teacher*; Karl Dykema, Youngstown College; Milacent Grimes Ocvirk, Ithaca, New York, High School; Helen F. Olson, Queen Anne High School, Seattle, Washington; Wanda Robertson, University of Utah; Lorieta Scheerer, Redondo Beach, California, High School.

This slate will be presented for action at the meeting of the Board next November. Other nomination(s) may be made by petition(s)

signed by twenty Directors of the Council and presented to the Secretary of the Council, with the written consent of the nominee(s), before August 16. When Mr. Farmer moves the election of the committee's nominees, other nominations may be made by members of the Board.



Mary Harbage's article, "The Right Child and the Right Book," in the February NEA *Journal*, illustrates quite vividly the many things that reading can do for children. But the benefits can be derived only if the child has the right book—one that whets his interest, or fulfills his wishes.

Miss Harbage relates many of her interesting adventures in creating enthusiastic readers among children. One was of a Reading Club in which the members let the secretary know when they wanted to be called on to read something. The children, of course, had to read well to keep from boring the others. Another was of a class that was read to during the last twenty minutes of the day.

In the area of mental hygiene Miss Harbage shows how children accept their behavior or alter it in the light of their understandings as their reading mirrors back to them their emo-

<sup>1</sup>John Deere Junior High School, Moline, Illinois.

tions, attitudes, and reactions. Books, too, give them friends to cherish and admire and help reduce their tensions. Other children, city-bound, get the pets they are unable otherwise to own.

The possibilities of adventuring through books are well known. An additional aspect that Miss Harbage points out is that the change of scene is often a cure for many emotional upsets. Books can make children aware of the out doors. They can become active in some way making things, doing things.

Miss Harbage writes of her work with a group of economically under-privileged children, many of whom were from broken homes. It was obvious to her that the attention and affection of the two stories a day she read them substituted for parental duties which had not been carried out. As for living by some values and shaping one's life around a philosophy, Miss Harbage feels that books may be the answer to finding the happiness in the meaning of life.

By way of caution it is pointed out that life's challenges must be met and accepted. Reading must not become for children a dream world refuge. Rather, it should help them realize that there is a commonality in all of life's experiences.

Of special value in Miss Harbage's article are the names of books which she had found of excellence in meeting particular needs and wishes of children. These may be found in the original article, which we recommend very highly.



"Free and Inexpensive Teaching Aids for the Language Arts," a supplement to the *Chicago Schools Journal* compiled by Dr. Irwin J. Suloway, may be obtained for the cost of handling—ten cents. Orders should be sent to the *Journal* at Chicago Teachers College, 6800 Stewart Avenue, Chicago 21.



Teachers in grades one through sixteen may be interested in *Selections for Memorizing*, which bring together our common heritage of purpose, ideals, love of country, beauty, and wisdom. Selections for each grade are published as a Personal Growth leaflet which can be presented to each student.

Teachers may receive a single copy free for any one grade by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Section 25, NEA, 1201 Sixteenth Street, NW, Washington 6, D. C. Indicate the grade desired. Teachers who wish to have the entire collection in one volume will find it in the *American Citizens Handbook*, two dollars per copy.



During the summer the University of Minnesota will sponsor a Language Arts Conference at the Center for Continuation Study from June 30 through July 3. Inquiries concerning the conference should be addressed to Frederick Berger at the Center for Continuation Study, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.



Dr. Miles A. Tinker writes in his article, "How Well Do Your Pupils Read?" (in the February *NEA Journal*), of the need for frequent reappraisal of a child's progress in reading, and an adjustment of the program to meet the child's individual needs. The reappraisal is made by four kinds of instruments: informal reading tests, teacher observation, questionnaires, and record-keeping.

The four instruments' use, merits, and shortcomings are evaluated by Dr. Tinker. He states that no single appraisal technic is the best, for they are used for different purposes. The best appraisal of the total pattern of growth in reading is that of information coordinated from all sources of evaluation.

The objective, as Mr. Tinker puts it, is not fact collecting but the attainment of a basis for guidance in individualizing instruction. This is

done by ascertaining the child's strengths and weaknesses in the various areas of reading—identification and recognition, vocabulary meaning and concepts, comprehension, rate of reading, study skills, specialized reading skills, oral reading, attitudes, and interests and tastes. Information in these areas should not just be filed away. The good teacher uses it to adjust his teaching to individual strengths and weaknesses in teaching children how to read.

Dr. Tinker treats the subject in detail in his new book (1952), *Teaching Elementary Reading*.



*A Chart on Rules for Handling Motions* is free to teachers, while the supply lasts, from the NEA.

The chart is adopted from *Parliamentary Procedures*, a pictorial presentation of how to conduct a meeting, prepared by Creative Graphics, Denver University. The chart presents the rules for handling, seconding, discussing, amending, voting on, and reconsidering the five types of motions. Technical terms are followed by parenthetical explanations, and, in addition, footnotes are a part of the chart which is in black and white.

The chart may be ordered from the NEA, 1201 16th Street, NW, Washington 6, D. C.



*Children's Books Around the World*, a catalog, has been published by the American Association of University Women. The bulletin was prepared to accompany an exhibit of 265 children's books from 52 countries. The exhibit was initiated by the Children's Library Association which, in order to obtain the books, enlisted the aid of the International Information Administration of the Department of State. The books themselves were collected through the Department's Information Centers and Public Affairs Officers overseas, according to a news release in the February *Childhood Education* magazine.

For information regarding the exhibit and copies of the bulletin teachers may write to the American Association of University Women, 1634 Eye Street, NW, Washington 6, D. C.



"Speech Training in a Democracy" will be the theme of the tenth annual speech conference at the State University Teachers College, Geneseo, New York, May 8. C. Agnes Rigney, director of the speech and dramatic art department of the college, will be the general chairman for the conference.

The speakers at the conference will be: Dr. Katherine F. Thorn, director of the speech clinic and associate professor of drama and speech at the University of Buffalo, who will speak on "Speech Correction with the Classroom Teacher"; James M. O'Neill, author and lecturer; and Dr. Robert A. Greene, chairman of the department of science of Geneseo STC, who has done work in the field of dramatics and will speak on "Mr. Punch Goes to School."

During the course of the conference, a play produced by the college drama club and campus school children will be presented.



The 1952-53 catalog of Cadmus Books is available from the publisher, E. M. Hale and Company, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The catalog contains 315 titles, 35 of which are new titles published in 1952.

Cadmus Books are classed in seven groups, from grade one through the junior high school. The listings include author, a brief annotation, and list and net prices.



American Education Week will be observed next fall November 8-14. The general theme will be "Good Schools Are Your Responsibility."

The sponsoring organizations nationally are the National Education Association, the Ameri-

can Legion, the US Office of Education, and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers.

Daily topics are: Sunday, Moral and Spiritual Foundations; Monday, Learning the Fundamentals; Tuesday, Building the National Strength; Wednesday, Preparing for Loyal Citizenship; Thursday, The School Board in Action; Friday, Your Child's Teachers; Saturday, Parent and Teacher Teamwork.



Here are the Junior Literary Guild selections for the month of May, 1953:

For boys and girls 5 and 6 years of age: *Bobby's Happy Day*, by Alf Evers. Rand McNally and Co., \$2.50.

For boys and girls 7 and 8 years of age: *Billy Goes Exploring*, by Dorothy Sterling. Doubleday and Co., \$2.00.

For boys and girls 9, 10, and 11 years of age: *Ride West Into Danger*, by Billy Warren. David McKay and Co., \$2.50.

For older girls, 12 to 16 years of age: *Sink the Basket*, by Sally Knapp. Thomas Y. Crowell Co., \$2.50.

For older boys, 12 to 16 years of age: *Barface*, by Tom Person. Pellegrini and Cudahy, \$2.50.



Newbery-Caldecott bookmarks for 1953 can be obtained now from the Children's Book Council. Printed on stiff paper, they measure  $9\frac{1}{2}'' \times 2\frac{1}{2}''$ . Decorated with the Newbery and Caldecott seals, the bookmarks list all award winners. There is a choice of two attractive colors, tangerine and green. You may select one color or a combination. Prices are as follows: 100 for \$1.00, 300 for \$2.75, 500 for \$3.75, 1,000 for \$7.00. Send requests to the Children's Book Council, 50 West 53rd St., New York 19. Please do *not* send stamps.

## Professional Publications

*Clinical Studies in Reading II*. Edited by Helen M. Robinson. Supplementary Educational Monographs, No. 77. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953. \$3.75.

Part I of this report describes the problems encountered in diagnosing poor readers with visual deficiencies and in providing for adequate therapy. This part includes also a number of case studies. Part II contains research reports by members of the clinic staff on the subjects of visual efficiency in relation to reading, personality adjustment and reading, eye-hand preference and reading, and prediction of increase in silent reading rate. Part III reports research studies by graduate students on the subjects of symptoms of visual difficulty, sex differences in reading achievement, auditory deficiencies of poor readers, and the selection and use of

trade books with poor readers. Part IV presents discussions of problems relating to vision and reading, by such eminent authorities as Gesell and Eames. Part V summarizes significant conclusions.

Certain of these conclusions are of special interest. For example, previous studies have revealed that girls generally exceed boys in reading achievement in the first two grades. This study indicates that boys do not catch up until the fifth grade. The editor speculates on the possible causes for this difference. Another conclusion is that pupils who exhibit mixed preference as to eye and hand make no more reversals than do those with consistent eye and hand preference. The majority of the retarded readers studied appeared to have adequate auditory acuity and discrimination.



*The Three R's in the Elementary School.* Prepared by a Committee of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Margaret Lindsey, Chairman. Washington, D. C.: The National Education Association, 1952, \$1.50.

The chapter headings of this very helpful brochure suggest the scope of the report: "Children Need the Three R's," "Children Have Their Ways of Growing and Learning," "The School Helps Children to Listen, Speak, and Write," "The School Helps Children to Read," "The School Helps Children with Numbers," "Children Learn the Three R's in a Functional Setting," and "Forward We Must Go."

The discussion combines a sound interpretation of child growth and child needs with an excellent grasp of the problems of classroom methodology.



*Holiday Programs for Boys and Girls.* By Aileen Fisher. Boston: Plays, Inc., 1953, \$3.50.

This book offers elementary and junior high school teachers plays, group readings, and recitations for nineteen holidays and special days in the school calendar. The plays make up the best part of the book, with those written in prose being of a consistently higher calibre than those

in verse. They are built around interesting and believable incidents, and present no major production problems. The production notes at the end of the book should prove helpful to the director. The group readings show little imagination when it comes to variety of presentation. Too often the verses are divided among boys, girls, and chorus rather than using the many possible variations of voice quality or differing numbers of voices. The quality of the verse in the group readings and recitations is not high. One might wish for greater literary merit at this point.

Kenneth Burns

The University of Illinois



*Gateways to Readable Books.* By Ruth Strang, Christine B. Gilbert, and Margaret C. Scogin. 2nd Edition. H. W. Wilson Company, \$2.75.

A valuable booklist brought up to date. This annotated graded list of books in many fields for adolescents who find reading difficult contains more than eleven hundred titles, classified under such headings as adventure, animal life, aviation, careers, family life, hobbies, humor, Indians and cowboys, and mysteries. Most of the books are of fifth, sixth, and seventh grade level of difficulty.

# BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

EDITED BY MAY HILL ARBUTHNOT  
[May Hill Arbuthnot is well-known as teacher, writer, and lecturer in the field of children's books. She is author of the volume, *CHILDREN AND BOOKS* (Scott, Foresman, 1947) and Associate Professor Emeritus of Western Reserve University.]

## *Series Books*

In 1932, when a small book appeared called *Abe Lincoln: Pioneer Boy*, by Augusta Stevenson, no one seems to have realized that it marked the beginning of an avalanche. There are now over seventy books in that series, *Childhood of Famous Americans*,<sup>1</sup> and nothing is to prevent there being seventy more unless a shortage develops in the crop of noble Americans. Time was, in the 1930's, when the reading of biographies in the elementary schools had to be encouraged. Now the problem is to make time for reading anything else. Time was, also in the 1930's, when a single volume of biography for youth could be read at leisure and appraised reflectively. Now biographies roll in by the tens and twelves, ranging in size and content from the picture book variety to hefty tomes by notable writers intent on authenticity and full length portraits of their heroes. Not only is the numerical impact of biographies staggering but the duplication of heroes has reached the point where it is a major feat of memory to keep track of whose George Washington is which and which Abraham Lincoln is whose. And there are plenty of other patriots who are also achieving volumes each.

This duplication is regrettable but not surprising, with six or more publishing houses simultaneously devoted to recreating United States history in terms of its great men. And on the whole, they are doing it well with respect

both for the child's capacities and for historical authenticity. Gone are the cherry tree episodes. These juvenile biographies are fictionalized but the invented conversations are generally based on the evidence of historical record and are used to dramatize or illumine some well established facet in the hero's character. Legend and myth are so labelled as in Jane Mayer's Introduction to her book, *Betsy Ross and the Flag* (Random House, 1952) in which she frankly calls her story a "half-way legend." But, she points out, such and such facts are known and these seem to justify the preservation of the story.

A great deal of skilful writing is going into the composition of these juvenile biographies as well as historical documentation. Adults pick up some of them and can't put them down until they have read to the end. High school teachers are discovering their worth for slow readers and both teachers and students enjoy them. Not every series is equally good and not every book in any series is of equal merit. Actually, each book should be read and appraised for its own worth or lack of it and if there is not time for that then, grownups who guide children's reading should know something about the range and qualities of the best of the series.

Since Bobbs-Merrill's *Childhood of Famous Americans* seems to have launched the bio-<sup>1</sup>Bobbs-Merrill.

graphy fever both with children and publishers, it might be said to have first place chronologically. The small books with large print and silhouette pictures are familiar to most teachers today. The last four titles, 1952, *John Wanamaker: Boy Merchant*, by Olive Burt, *Raphael Semmes: Tidewater Boy*, by Dorothea J. Snow, *Molly Pitcher: Girl Patriot*, by Augusta Stevenson and *Knute Rockne: Young Athlete*, by Guernsey Jr. follow the same pattern established by the first four books of some twenty years ago. The heroes or heroines are merry, sometimes mischievous but never markedly off-center. There is little or no hint of tragedy in those we have read. Grief and limitations are minimized, the happy adjustment is stressed and the stories unfold like well conducted fairy tales. Why have children loved these books and read them by the dozen? First, of course, they are easy to read. Short sentences, short paragraphs, lots of conversation and an easy vocabulary make the reading process as painless as possible. Second, from the child's standpoint these books are good reading and this point should not be underestimated. The stories are built around genuinely amusing or interesting episodes, and these are related in lively style. These qualities together with the success-story formula have endeared the books to capable as well as poor readers. Augusta Stevenson, their first and most prolific author, is a remarkably good storyteller. Miriam Mason, Helen Monsell, Dorothea Snow, Jean Wagoner, Olive Burt and others are also skillful narrators. But the fact remains, that the pattern they follow in this series is becoming more and more of a stereotype. The books are valuable for retarded readers and as lures for a few determined non-readers. Easy, fluent reading is good practice for good readers also. But able children should be led to more substantial books about these same heroes.

For example, Morrow Company has a brief series of biographies with similar age appeal, 8 or 9 to 12. These are also easy to read. The

last two books, 1952, were *Kit Carson*, by Margaret Bell, illustrated by Harry Daugherty and *Columbus, Finder of the New World*, by Robert Syme, reviewed in the March issue of this magazine. Both books ignore the hero's childhood and begin with his mature goals and frustrations. The life of Columbus swings from the triumphs of the first voyage to the somber diminuendo of his last years, when the tragedy of his defeat ends only with death. Yet children will accept this tragedy because the spirit of the man remains proud and courageous to the end. This is a more realistic approach to biography.

It is interesting to see how the picture book biographies written and illustrated by Ingri and Edgar d'Aulaire have improved since their first one, *George Washington*, was published by Doubleday in 1936. Their *Abraham Lincoln*, 1939, won the Caldecott Medal. It begins, as all of the books do, with his childhood. It does not include the tragic death of the President but ends with the conclusion of the war and the freeing of the slaves. There is considerable humor both in the pictures and the text and elementary as the latter is, the man emerges—with his homespun drollery, his melancholy and his lack of conventionality. The last book in this series, *Buffalo Bill*, 1952, will be fun for the small fry but *Benjamin Franklin*, 1950, is best of all. It shows the sturdy, serious Ben, all boy but more than ordinarily curious and energetic. His grownup feats as writer, statesman, scientist and patriot are briefly recorded but give more than a hint of the diversity of the mature Franklin. The wise sayings of the man, which adorn the borders of the pages, are delightful additions to the text. These pictorial preliminaries to biography, for children as young as six and as old as eight or nine, pave the way for fuller biographies, but are colorful and vigorous in their own right.

The "Initial" biographies written and illustrated by Genevieve Foster and published by Scribner's are a next step, perhaps. *George*

*Washington*, 1949, *Abraham Lincoln*, 1950 and *Andrew Jackson*, 1951, record the main events in the lives of these men. Like everything Mrs. Foster has written, these books are exceedingly well done. *Andrew Jackson* makes the liveliest reading but all three books capture the interest of young readers.

Clara Ingram Judson is also making a fine contribution to approximately the same age group, 9 to 12. Published by Wilcox and Follett, the books are: *Abraham Lincoln, Friend of the People*, illustrated by Robert Frankenberg; kodachromes of the Chicago Historical Society Lincoln dioramas, 1950, *George Washington, Leader of the People*, illustrated by Robert Frankenberg, 1951 and *Thomas Jefferson, Champion of the People* illustrated by Robert Frankenberg, 1952. Each one of these books represents a careful research of source materials and as a result a fresh approach to the man and his achievements. Jefferson is especially well done and the fine illustrations have undoubtedly added to the popularity of these books.

When, to the biographies by Mrs. Foster and Mrs. Judson we add Jeannette Eaton's *That Lively Man, Ben Franklin*, illustrated by Henry Pitz, Morrow, 1948 and *Washington, the Nation's First Hero*, illustrated by Ralph Ray, Morrow, 1951 also for children 9 to 12, we have substantial and well written books to lead children into the more mature, full length biographies of Jeannette Eaton's own *Leader By Destiny* (also *George Washington*, Harcourt, 1938) and to that remarkable series known as *The Landmark Books*.

Random House launched this series in 1950 and the books are now thirty strong with many imitators but few rivals. The name of the series indicates its approach to history. The books present the men or movements or moments which have been landmarks in United States history, as for example, *The Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, *The Wright Brothers*, *Lee and Grant at Appomattox*. Adequate illus-

trations, substantial bindings and attractive format make these books remarkable values at the uniform price of \$1.50. Such notable writers as Dorothy Canfield Fisher, John Mason Brown, Samuel Hopkins Adams, Quentin Reynolds, MacKinlay Kantor, Jim Kjelgard, Stewart Holbrook and others have given the books unusual literary distinction. These writers are a guarantee of the interest values of the books but not of their easy-to-read qualities. Of the first ten volumes, *The Wright Brothers*, *The Pony Express* and *The California Gold Rush* could be read by capable nine-year-olds and all of the others by the elevens and twelves. Of the last ten books, probably eight of them belong to the high school students or to the remarkably mature and intellectually superior children below that level. Even so, this series of books is superlatively well done and is a major contribution to the information and inspiration of young Americans today.

**Landmark Books, Random House, 1952**

*Daniel Boone*, by John Mason Brown. A full length portrait of a popular hero by a distinguished author. 14—

*Clipper Ships*, by John Jennings. A record of the part that the great clipper ships and their crews played in history. 14—

*Gettysburg*, by MacKinlay Kantor. The impact of war and the two armies on a peaceful countryside is superbly told by the author of the still more dramatic *Lee and Grant At Appomattox*. 12—

*The Louisiana Purchase*, by Robert Tallant. Definitely for high school students.

*Wild Bill Hickok Tames the West*, by Stewart Holbrook. Exciting enough to satisfy the most inveterate addicts of Westerns. More gore than seems justifiable. 12—16

*Betsy Ross and the Flag*, by Jane Mayer. A nebulous heroine takes on flesh and blood reality for young readers. 10—14

*The Conquest of the North and South Poles*, by Russell Owen. Fascinating accounts of both Peary and Byrd and their explorations. 12—16

*Ben Franklin of Old Philadelphia*, by Margaret Cousins. An unusually complete account of Franklin's diverse achievements, well and simply written. 10-14

*Trappers and Traders of the Far West*, by James Daugherty. Like everything this gifted author-artist writes, this book is a lively, humorous record of heroic men and their achievements. 12-

*Mr. Bell Invents the Telephone*, by Katherine B. Shippen. This record of a modest genius, his deaf wife and the devoted partner of all his inventions is one of the most absorbing books in the series. 12-

These brief comments cover a few but not by any means all of the fine biographical series now available. The range of three or more years in the age-appeal of each book is necessary because of the variation in reading skill, intelligence, and social maturity of individual children in a group. One thing becomes evident. For almost any one of the founding fathers or for any particular period in United States history, it is now possible to give children in a class different books to read commensurate with their abilities. Yet when this is done, from the easiest-to-read biography to the most advanced each child will have a book he can respect and enjoy and from which he can make a creditable contribution to class discussion. The new respect for authenticity has not made the biographies written for children dull; instead, the new books have made men and movements of the past come more vividly alive than ever before.

Perhaps because these series of biographies are so well done, we should remember that there are many individual biographies outside any series which are as fine as the best books in any group. Elizabeth Janet Gray's *Penn*, Viking, 1938, has never been surpassed. Florence Crannell Means' *Carver's George*, illustrated by Harve Stein, Houghton, 1952, is a splendid full length portrait of a genius for young readers 10 to 14. And last year's *Chanti-*

*cleer of Wilderness Road*, by Meridel Le Seur, illustrated by Aldren Watson, Knopf, 1951 was a vigorous, poetic, and amusing picture of Davy Crockett which will charm boys and girls 10 to 14, not yet ready for Constance Rourke's still fuller account of the man. And this is what these biographies written for children should do—develop their liking for this type of reading and so lead them to fuller records of their favorite heroes.

#### Other Series

Science books by Herbert S. Zim, Morrow, 1953

*What's Inside Me?* Illustrated by Herschel Wartik. \$1.75.

*What's Inside Plants?* Illustrated by Herschel Wartik. \$1.75

*What's Inside Engines?* Illustrated by Raymond Perlman. \$1.75

*The Sun.* Illustrated by Larry Kettelkamp. \$2.00

It is difficult to keep praise of Herbert Zim's science series within the bounds of moderation. Whether he is writing about *Rabbits*, *Snakes*, *Man in the Air*, *Lightning and Thunder*, or *What's Inside Me?* his books are lucid expositions of subjects which captivate children as young as six and any adults who are lured into reading them. Many illustrations add to but do not duplicate the text. Two sizes of type are frequently used—the large type for the child to read himself and small type for an adult to read to the child. This last device is a debatable one. It is admirable if it draws the adult into the sphere of the child's interests and promotes discussion and amplification. It is of doubtful value, if as some people think, the child who is old enough to be interested in the content of the smaller type, would be old enough to read it for himself. The books are crammed with facts, neither dull facts nor sugar-coated but often dramatically pointed up by sharp contrasts as:

A ball of coal the size of the sun would burn up completely in 3000 years.

The sun has been burning for perhaps 3 billion years and still has a long way to go.

This same book, *The Sun*, also *What's Inside Engines?* contain suggestions for simple experiments which children can carry out for themselves. *The Sun* is the twelfth and one of the most impressive books in the series. Experts check on the accuracy of these books, which not only answer children's questions and stimulate more, but which feed their sense of wonder.

#### *First Book Series*

Another non-fiction series is the *First Books* published by Franklin Watts, \$1.75 each. When the subjects are listed there seems to be no rhyme or reason to the selection—Airplanes, America, Automobiles, Babies, Baseball, Bees, Birds, Boats, Bugs, Cartoons For Kids, Dogs, Eskimos, Firemen, Fishing, God, Horses, Indians, et cetera up to something over thirty titles. Many competent writers and artists have contributed to this series and some of the books are good additions to the child's non-fiction reading. Others are commonplace, over-crowded with a miscellany of facts and showing a curious lack of organization. For these reasons, selections from this series should be made on the basis of individual books. Of the samples we have seen, these were decidedly worth while.

*The First Book of Bees*, by Albert B. Tibbets, pictures by Helene Carter. The life history of the bee is beautifully told. Adults as well as children will enjoy this book. 9—

*The First Book of Snakes*, by John Hoke, pictures by Paul Wenck. A fascinating defense of snakes, their values to man, varieties, habits, treatment for snake bites. 9—

*The First Book of Stones*, by M. B. Cormack, pictures by M. K. Scott. This fascinating account of how stones happen is already enormously popular with young stone collectors in the West. 9—

*The First Book of Dogs*, by Gladys Tabor, pictures by Bob Kuhn.

*The First Book of Horses*, by Isabel McLennan McMeekin, pictures by Pers Crowell. In addition to the popularity of these subjects the content is remarkably good. Breeds of dogs, the training of puppies, the history of horses, their breeds and work, are appealingly told. 7—12

*The First Book of Eskimos*, by Benjamin Brewster, pictures by Ursula Koering. This book suffers from an overload of facts, not too well organized, but useful nevertheless. 9—12

*The First Book of Negroes*, by Langston Hughes, pictures by Ursula Koering. Terry, a small Negro boy living in New York, hears the story of his people from his grandmother and his parents. In spite of poor organization this story is objectively and sensitively told by a Negro poet who loves his people and his country and concludes his story with a tribute to "the most wonderful country in the world, and I'd rather live here than anywhere else on earth." A good introductory book before Arna Bontemps' history of the Negro people. 10—14

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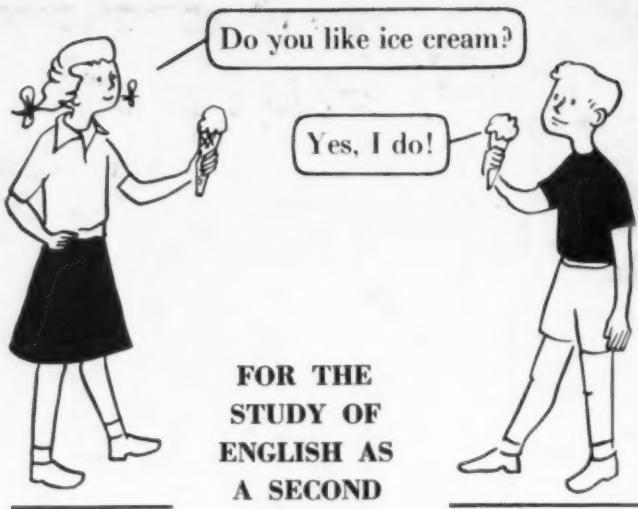
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